

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



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## An Old Journal under a New Cover

This issue, sporting a new cover designed by Colleen Bartzsch, gives us reasons to celebrate. First, after being two years behind in our publication schedule, *CTQ* is now current. Our readers have been pleasantly surprised by the receipt of 15 issues since December 2006, a few of which were two issues printed under one cover in order to save postage. Some of you have even suggested that our journal should now be named *Concordia Theological Monthly*! Although David Scaer previously mentioned the key persons who helped in this catch-up process (see *CTQ* 70 [July/October 2006]: 367), I again express our sincere appreciation for the dedicated work of Annette Gard (*CTQ* Administrative Assistant), Jason Braaten (*CTQ* Graduate Assistant in 2006–2007), and Peter Gregory (*CTQ* Graduate Assistant in 2007–2008). The exemplary quality and quantity of these issues, produced under a demanding schedule, is due to these three individuals.

A second reason to celebrate is because this journal has been blessed for many years by the editorial leadership and writing of David P. Scaer. As we begin our seventy-second year of publication, it is worthy to note that it has been almost four decades since Scaer first became Editor of this journal (see *The Springfielder* 33, no. 3 [December 1969]: 1). Over 30 years ago, he introduced both a new name (*The Springfielder* became *Concordia Theological Quarterly*) and a new cover (see his editorial in *CTQ* 41 [January 1977]: 1–2). The respect that *CTQ* enjoys among its readers as one of the most important journals in Lutheran theology is due, in large part, to Scaer's work. He has been a consistent advocate for letting this journal be "the theological voice" of our seminary to the wider church, an untiring editor in cultivating the right mix of writings for publication, and a prolific author of countless incisive articles that have appeared in these pages over the past four decades. We are thankful that he continues to serve as Editor.

We hope you enjoy the small changes in this issue and those that will follow. Do not, however, expect an issue each month: we are back to four issues a year, one every three months! Most of all, we pray that you will continue to be blessed and nurtured by the theology—especially the faithful witness to Jesus Christ—presented in this journal.

Charles A. Gieschen  
Associate Editor

## *Pro Deo et Patria:* Themes of the Cruciform Life in Dietrich Bonhoeffer<sup>1</sup>

Eric R. Andrae

**"There are still . . . hearts and minds who love God's Word,  
their fatherland and their freedom."<sup>2</sup>**

Many love Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and many hate him. Although some claim to know and understand Bonhoeffer, others assert that few actually do. There are at least two reasons for much of the misunderstanding: Bonhoeffer preached and was published widely before he became a devout Christian (ca. 1932), as he himself acknowledged,<sup>3</sup> and material, including many personal letters, were published from the midst of prison struggles. In The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), he has been generally ignored.<sup>4</sup> In 2006, Bonhoeffer's centennial year, however, both LCMS seminaries had conferences devoted to examining aspects of his life and thought.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier and much longer form of this article was presented at the second annual Pastors' Study Week at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catherines, Canada, on June 19–20, 2006. The Latin title translates "For God and Fatherland."

<sup>2</sup> The quotation is from Bonhoeffer's cousin and confidant, Hans Christoph von Hase, as quoted in Uwe Siemon-Netto, *The Fabricated Luther: The Rise and Fall of the Shirer Myth* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 92.

<sup>3</sup> See Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, ed. and trans. David McL. Gracie (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1986), 42–48, on his encounter with the Bible. See also Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, ed. Victoria J. Barnett, trans. Eric Mosbacher, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 205.

<sup>4</sup> An exception to this exclusion has been *Christian News*, which has labeled him a heretic, a false teacher, and an unbeliever. For example, "Evangelicals Who Promote Unbelievers: Bonhoeffer Worshipped a False Christ," *Christian News* (New Haven, MO), June 5, 2006, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, held its "Dietrich Bonhoeffer Conference" on February 3–4, 2006, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, with the Bonhoeffer Centennial Committee of America, held a conference entitled "Will the Real Dietrich Bonhoeffer Please Stand Up?" on July 19–21, 2006.

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Bonhoeffer's reception, which Stephen Haynes calls *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon* in his insightful overview of the topic, is fascinating.<sup>6</sup> Haynes provides a survey of Bonhoeffer interpretation with sections on "The Historical Bonhoeffer," "The Radical Bonhoeffer," "The Liberal Bonhoeffer," "The Conservative Bonhoeffer," and "The Universal Bonhoeffer." One obvious omission would seem to be a chapter on "The Confessional Bonhoeffer," or simply "The Lutheran Bonhoeffer."<sup>7</sup> While in the past Bonhoeffer has often been extolled among liberal Lutherans and shunned by conservative Lutherans, there is now increasing interest in and appreciation for Bonhoeffer among some conservative, confessional Lutherans.<sup>8</sup> This study offers a similar perspective by looking at some of the themes in his thought, life, and death from a confessional Lutheran perspective. Some may argue that Bonhoeffer cannot fit into this category; certainly there is room for criticism, as well as reason to distance oneself from several of his positions. While acknowledging these areas, the purpose of this study is to show what—and there is much—confessional Lutherans can affirm in Bonhoeffer's writings and actions.

After Martin Luther, Bonhoeffer may arguably be the most recognized and quoted, as well as the most misunderstood and misapplied, Lutheran theologian today. The full-page spread that his centennial received in a February 2006 issue of *The USA Today* certainly confirms that he is widely appreciated.<sup>9</sup> Uwe Siemon-Netto even advocates reclaiming Bonhoeffer for confessional Lutheranism. He claims that for decades Bonhoeffer has been misinterpreted, misrepresented, and hijacked by odd admirers: the unorthodox theologies of the 1960s "God is dead" movement, the left-wing, the liberationists, the radicals, the postmodernists, and others. Siemon-Netto tells them to "step back and hand [Bonhoeffer] over to us."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> On "The Lutheran Bonhoeffer," see *Lutheran Forum* 27, no. 3 (1993). In personal correspondence with Haynes, he acknowledged this omission (e-mail dated January 13, 2006). [It must also be acknowledged that Bonhoeffer did not identify himself with confessional Lutheranism; he was a life-long member of the Prussian Union. The Editors]

<sup>8</sup> For example, Uwe Siemon-Netto and Charles Ford in St. Louis. The fruit of this has been seen at the two conferences mentioned above.

<sup>9</sup> G. Jeffrey MacDonald, "Courage vs. Conscience," *USA Today*, February 1, 2006, 6D. Matthew Becker calls Bonhoeffer "the most influential Lutheran theologian of the twentieth century" in his review of *Till the Night Be Past: The Life and Times of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, by Theodore J. Kleinhaus, *Concordia Journal* 30 (2004): 409.

<sup>10</sup> Uwe Siemon-Netto, "Welcome Back, Dietrich," *The Lutheran Witness* (February 2006): 16, 17, and Siemon-Netto, "Bonhoeffer, the Bold Sinner," (Fort Wayne, IN:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born on February 4, 1906, in Breslau, then the capital of German Silesia, now part of Poland. He was executed on April 9, 1945, at Flossenburg concentration camp for directly assisting persecuted Jews,<sup>11</sup> as well as for his part in assassination plots against Adolf Hitler. What follows is an introduction to a few important themes in Bonhoeffer that deserve close attention: suffering, prayer, action, and community.

### I. Suffering (The Theology of the Cross)

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."<sup>12</sup> These words from *The Cost of Discipleship* are arguably Bonhoeffer's most famous. He lived out their meaning in a most tangible and unique way. They find their context within his theology of the cross as a whole, and specifically in his discussion of grace, discipleship, and the cross. Indeed, for Bonhoeffer, "everything depended on the *theologia crucis*. . . ."<sup>13</sup>

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise godfearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call. Jesus' summons to the rich young man was calling him to die, because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ. In fact every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts. But we do not want to die, and therefore Jesus Christ and his call are necessarily our death as well as our life.<sup>14</sup>

There is neither neutrality nor luke-warmness with the one who is a consuming fire. One is never the same after being met by the Lord who confronts you: you die to self, the world, and its ways. This is painful. It is a cutting off, a pruning, and a drowning. There is no way around the cross;

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Concordia Theological Seminary, 2006), <http://www.ctsfw.edu/events/bonhoeffer/BonhoefferEssays.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> "In 1943 [he was] arrested for [his] involvement in a successful *Abwehr* operation that enabled 14 Jews to escape Germany." Charles Ford, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the German Resistance" (unpublished paper, March 11, 1995), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 99.

<sup>13</sup> Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 888.

<sup>14</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 99.

one can only go through it. Death, even the resulting (new) birth, is painful. After being in the presence of Christ, one will either remain dead or will have a new life, but that person will never again be the same. "For the rest of mankind to be with Christ means death, but for Christians it is [finally] a means of grace."<sup>15</sup> Bonhoeffer describes the suffering of the Christian life:

The call to discipleship, the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ means both death and life. The call of Christ, his baptism, sets the Christian in the middle of the daily arena against sin and the devil. Every day he encounters new temptations, and every day he must suffer anew for Jesus Christ's sake. The wounds and scars he receives in the fray are living tokens of this participation in the cross of his Lord. But there is another kind of suffering and shame which the Christian is not spared. While . . . only the sufferings of Christ are a means of atonement, yet since he has suffered for and borne the sins of the whole world and shares with his disciples the fruits of his passion, the Christian also has to undergo temptation, he too has to bear the sins of others; he too must bear their shame and be driven like a scapegoat from the gates of the city. But he 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.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, this forgiving is exceedingly difficult for sinners. Indeed, it would be impossible were it not that the forgiveness is Christ's, won and given by him. Forgiveness overcomes sin because the forgiveness of Christ, in which the baptized participate, removes sin.

As Christ bears our burdens, so ought we to bear the burdens of our fellow-men. The law of Christ . . . is the bearing of the cross. My brother's burden which I must bear is not only his outward lot, his natural characteristics and gifts, but quite literally his sin. And the only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it in the power of the cross of Christ in which I now share. Thus the call to follow Christ always means a call to share the work of forgiving men their sins. Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian's duty to bear.<sup>17</sup>

Baptism is foundational to Bonhoeffer's understanding of the theology of the cross, the Christian's suffering in this world. The call to discipleship

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<sup>15</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 268.

<sup>16</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 99-100.

<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 100. Others are borne in and through prayer as well; see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., vol. 5, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 90, hereafter DBW.

is baptism.<sup>18</sup> Bonhoeffer makes explicit the connection between baptism and the cross with its forgiveness. Consider, for example, his sacramental focus in his explication of key texts such as Romans 6 and Galatians 2:

Baptismal death means justification from sin. The sinner must die that he may be delivered from his sin. If a man dies he is justified from sin (Rom. 6:7; Col. 2:20). Sin has no further claim on him, for death's demand has been met, and its account settled. Justification from . . . sin can only happen through death. Forgiveness of sin does not mean that the sin is overlooked and forgotten, it means a real death on the part of the sinner and his separation from . . . sin. But the only reason why the sinner's death can bring justification and not condemnation is that this death is a sharing of the death of Christ. It is baptism into the death of Christ which effects the forgiveness of sin and justification, and completes our separation from sin. The fellowship of the cross to which Jesus invited his disciples is the gift of justification through that cross, it is the gift of death and of the forgiveness of sins. . . . All this creates in them the assurance that they will also live with him.<sup>19</sup>

For Bonhoeffer, this Christ crucified is the very *imago Dei* that is recreated in the disciple through baptism. The conclusion of *The Cost of Discipleship* states:

The image of God is the image of Christ crucified. It is to this image that the life of the disciples must be conformed: in other words, they must be conformed to his death (Phil. 3:10; Rom. 6:4f). The Christian life is a life of crucifixion (Gal. 2:19). In baptism the form of Christ's death is impressed upon his own. They are dead to the flesh and to sin, they are dead to the world, and the world is dead to them (Gal. 6:14). Anybody living in the strength of Christ's baptism lives in the strength of Christ's death. Their life is marked by a daily dying in the war between the flesh and the spirit, and in the mortal agony the devil inflicts upon them day by day. This is the suffering of Christ which all his disciples on earth must undergo. A few, but only a few, of his followers are accounted worthy of the closest fellowship with his sufferings—the blessed martyrs. No other Christian is so closely identified with the form of Christ crucified. When Christians are exposed to public insult, when they suffer and die for his sake, Christ takes on visible form in his Church. Here we see the divine image created anew through the power of Christ crucified. But throughout the Christian

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<sup>18</sup> An imperfect appropriation of Bonhoeffer appears on the *Kjos Ministries Web site*, which includes the above quotation but without the references to the substitutionary atonement and the call of Jesus in baptism. "The Cost of Discipleship," *Kjos Ministries Web site*, <http://www.crossroad.to/Persecution/Bonhoeffer.html>; cf. *Shepherd's Notes – Bonhoeffer's Cost of Discipleship* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 258, 268.

life, from baptism to martyrdom, it is the same suffering and the same death.<sup>20</sup>

The cruciform presence of Christ in baptism shapes Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology. As such, he goes on to say, "The Church of Christ is the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit. In this way the life of the Body of Christ becomes our own life. In Christ we no longer live our own lives, but he lives his life in us. The life of the faithful in the Church is indeed the *Life of Christ in them*. . . ." <sup>21</sup> He states again: "Every day Christ is their death and Christ is their life."<sup>22</sup>

This life of the crucified Christ in the baptized "who have died after the old man through Christ" effects both faith and love:

Love, in the sense of spontaneous, unreflective action, spells the death of the old man. For man recovers his true nature in the righteousness of Christ and in his fellow-man. The love of Christ crucified, who delivers our old man to death, is the love which lives in those who follow him. "I live; yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Henceforth the Christian finds himself only in Christ and in his brethren.<sup>23</sup>

Or, as Luther famously said, a "Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor."<sup>24</sup>

## II. Prayer

Bonhoeffer's confession of the theology of the cross and his aversion to a theology of glory finds doxological expression in the life of prayer and meditation. Regarding the meaning and purpose of prayer, Bonhoeffer introduces his *Prayerbook of the Bible* with the following instruction:

"Lord, Teach Us to Pray!" So spoke the disciples to Jesus. In making this request, they confessed that they were not able to pray on their own, that they had to learn to pray. The phrase "learning to pray" sounds strange to

<sup>20</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 342

<sup>21</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 272.

<sup>22</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 321.

<sup>23</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 178-179.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 31:371, hereafter *LW*. Bonhoeffer concludes his chapter on "Discipleship and the Cross" by quoting from Luther on Psalm 32:8. See Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 103-104; in a different translation, the Luther quotation is available in *LW* 14:152.



us. If the heart does not overflow and begin to pray by itself, we say, it will never “learn” to pray. But it is a dangerous error, surely very widespread among Christians, to think that the heart can pray by itself. For then we confuse wishes, hopes, sighs, laments, rejoicings—all of which the heart can do by itself—with prayer. And we confuse earth and heaven, man and God. Prayer does not mean simply to pour out one’s heart. It means rather to find the way to God and to speak with him, whether the heart is full or empty. No man can do that by himself. For that he needs Jesus Christ.

The disciples want to pray, but they do not know how to do it. That can be very painful, to want to speak with God and not to be able to, to have to be speechless before God, to discover that every call to him dies within itself, that heart and mouth speak an absurd language that God does not want to hear. . . . If he [Jesus Christ] takes us with him in his prayer, if we are privileged to pray along with him, if he lets us accompany him on his way to God and teaches us to pray, then we are free from the agony of prayerlessness. But that is precisely what Jesus Christ wants to do. He wants to pray with us and have us pray with him, so that we may be confident and glad that God hears us. When our will wholeheartedly enters into the prayer of Christ, then we pray correctly. Only in Jesus Christ are we able to pray, and with him we also know that we shall be heard.

And so we must learn to pray. The child learns to speak because his father speaks to him. He learns the speech of his father. So we learn to speak to God because God has spoken to us and speaks to us. By means of the speech of the Father in heaven his children learn to speak with him. Repeating God’s own words after him, we begin to pray to him.<sup>25</sup>

This is the rhythm of worship and prayer: from the word of God to man—the word which prompts prayer and teaches how to pray—and then from word-saturated hearts and minds back to the Word made flesh who is at the right hand of the Father and yet dwells among Christians and in the world. Bonhoeffer continues:

We ought to speak to God and he wants to hear us, not in the false and confused speech of our heart, but in the clear and pure speech, which God has spoken to us in Jesus Christ. God’s speech in Jesus Christ meets us in the Holy Scriptures. If we wish to pray with confidence and gladness, then the words of Holy Scripture will have to be the solid basis of our

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<sup>25</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970), 9–11; see also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), 84–85. Norman Nagel echoes this understanding of worship in his introduction to *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 6.

prayer. For here we know that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, teaches us to pray.<sup>26</sup>

Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the Psalms is pervasively christocentric. Some liberal Lutheran scholars actually seem embarrassed at how Christ-centered Bonhoeffer is as an interpreter of the Psalms. An editorial footnote in the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* translation of *Prayerbook* suggests that Bonhoeffer's use of the phrase "Pauline Psalms" does violence to Scripture.<sup>27</sup> The editor also claims that "[f]ew exegetes today would agree . . . with Bonhoeffer's attempt to interpret the psalms of wrath in terms of the Christian gospel's insistence on forgiving one's enemies."<sup>28</sup> Bonhoeffer, however, insists on the doctrine of justification as the touchstone and thereby interprets these Psalms in light of Christ's forgiveness toward all.<sup>29</sup> In *Prayerbook*, he continues to advocate this christocentric reading of the Psalms:

If we want to read and to pray the prayers of the Bible and especially the Psalms, therefore, we must not ask first what they have to do with us, but what they have to do with Jesus Christ. We must ask how we can understand the Psalms as God's Word, and then we shall be able to pray them. It does not depend, therefore, on whether the Psalms express adequately that which we feel at a given moment in our heart. If we are to pray aright, perhaps it is quite necessary that we pray contrary to our own heart. Not what we want to pray is important, but what God wants us to pray. If we were dependent entirely on ourselves, we would probably pray only the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer. But God wants it otherwise. The richness of the Word of God ought to determine our prayer, not the poverty of our heart.

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<sup>26</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Prayer Book of the Bible*, 11–12.

<sup>27</sup> The editor's note seems to apply the following passage, written by Karl Holl about Luther, to Bonhoeffer: "Luther bases his interpretation on the conviction that the Bible in all its parts has one and the same meaning. Under this constraint he points out that what had become for him the most significant feature of the Bible, the Pauline Gospel, was also integral to the Psalms. He did not realize that he was, thereby, doing very serious violence to the text. The Psalms, indeed, preach self-justification as does the entire Old Testament. . . ." *Prayerbook* in DBW 5:171 n. 23.

<sup>28</sup> *Prayerbook* in DBW 5:174 n. 26. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, eds. Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), 15, 17.

<sup>29</sup> See Daniel Bloesch and F. Burton Nelson, "A Bonhoeffer Sermon Translated," *Theology Today* 38 (1982): 466, <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jan1982/v38-4-article3.htm>. See also Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 84–96; Bonhoeffer, *My Soul Finds Rest: Reflections on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 53–66; and Martin Kuske, *The Old Testament as the Book of Christ: An Appraisal of Bonhoeffer's Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

Thus if the Bible also contains a prayerbook, we learn from this that not only that Word which he has to say to us belongs to the Word of God, but also that word which he wants to hear from us, because it is the word of his beloved Son. This is pure grace, that God tells us how we can speak with and have fellowship with him. We can do it by praying in the name of Jesus Christ. The Psalms are given to us to this end, that we may learn to pray them in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup>

In his "Sermon on a Psalm of Vengeance," Bonhoeffer points us outside ourselves—*extra nos*—to Christ. Not only justifying righteousness but also the life of prayer is alien. Bonhoeffer outlines the proper order of application when praying the Psalms: "In David is Christ," he says, "and thereby the church of God. . . . Christ himself prays [the] psalm with David—and with Christ the whole church of God."<sup>31</sup> Biblical prayer asks first what the text says about Jesus. This is then applied to the *una sancta*, as well as to David, the human instrument. Only after these steps can one finally ask, "What does this mean for me?" By praying and asking in this way, one is led in true prayer to the true answer.<sup>32</sup> This pattern can also be applied in general to the Lord's Prayer, as well as to the collects and prayers of the church. A theology of glory would not only reverse the order just given but then would also stop at the first point with self. A theology of glory requests for the self: it demands expansion of its own territory, and daily bread narrowly and selfishly understood—and lots of it. A theology of glory establishes the word of man first and last. A theology of glory boasts that prayer is natural, overflowing from the heart.

The theology of the cross, however, understands that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). The theology of the cross proclaims that God is the Alpha and Omega of prayerful conversation: he has, and is, the first and last word. Bonhoeffer understood this literally: God's word in disciplined devotion and meditation<sup>33</sup> should begin each day, before other concerns arise, and should end the day as the proper conclusion. Significant time should be set

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<sup>30</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Prayer Book of the Bible*, 14–15.

<sup>31</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 87.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of how prayer flows from God's gracious will in Jesus Christ, see John Pless, "Prayer: The Voice of Faith," *For the Life of the World* 3, no. 2 (1999): 10, [http://www.lifeoftheworld.com/lotw/article.php?m\\_vol=3&m\\_num=2&a\\_num=3](http://www.lifeoftheworld.com/lotw/article.php?m_vol=3&m_num=2&a_num=3).

<sup>33</sup> Meditation is not dissecting and analyzing the word but accepting it: "You should accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart as Mary did." Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 33; cf. 44.

aside for this – up to an hour, undisturbed.<sup>34</sup> “Meet [Christ] first in the day, before you meet other people. . . . Before our daily bread should be the daily Word. . . . Before our daily work should be the morning prayer.”<sup>35</sup> Bonhoeffer maintained that the church, especially in times of crises, must “believe much, pray much, and suffer much.”<sup>36</sup> Bonhoeffer’s theology of prayer confesses the all-encompassing nature of the God of prayer with joy, because he knows that there is indeed a merciful God who teaches so that man may learn, who leads so that man may find, and who incorporates man into his sacred heart so that he may live. Having been taught to pray in the unshakeable language of God by God himself – and knowing that he delights to hear – the Christian prays in confidence and gladness.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, Bonhoeffer closes his introduction to prayer by quoting Luther: “[The Psalter] penetrates the Lord’s Prayer and the Lord’s Prayer penetrates it, so that it is possible to understand one on the basis of the other and to bring them into joyful harmony.”<sup>38</sup> Bonhoeffer concludes: “It makes good sense, then, that the Psalter is often bound together in a single volume with the New Testament. It is the prayer of the Christian church. It belongs to the Lord’s Prayer.”<sup>39</sup>

### III. Action

Prayer leads to action, for God is not to be called upon as a *deus ex machine*,<sup>40</sup> invoked simply to solve problems that humanity has created. Prayer is actional, instrumental, and incarnational. It calls upon God to use the faithful as his hands, feet, and voice (Matthew 25). Prayer is a petition that the heavenly Father would conform Christians to his will, both in word and deed (SC III, 10). Gustaf Wingren describes the relationship between prayer and action in Luther: “Turning to God in prayer, without using the external means which God has given, is tempting God; it is

<sup>34</sup> See Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 87; cf. 73, 97.

<sup>35</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 32, 39; see also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 290.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Torbjörn Johansson, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer – kristen bekännare in en svår tid,” *Kyrka och Folk* 15-16 (2006): 12 (my translation). “[Bonhoeffer’s] ecclesiology seemed entirely absorbed with the *theologia crucis*.” Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 887.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Johann Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations* (Decatur, IL: Repristination Press, 1998), 119-120. According to John Pless, “The confidence is not in the praying heart but in the promises of God. . . . The God who has given us His Son tenderly invites us to trust His Word and call upon His name with boldness and confidence.” Pless, “Prayer,” 10, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Bonhoeffer, *Prayer Book of the Bible*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Prayer Book of the Bible*, 16.

<sup>40</sup> See Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 281-282, 361; cf. 312.

*praesumptio*. . . [I]n vocation, man becomes God's mask . . . In his toil he is a tool in God's hands, bound before God, i.e., receiving and passive before God, but active outwardly."<sup>41</sup> Prayer calls to action; prayer bids to love. The theology of the cross and prayer, as creed and deed, were concretely expressed in Bonhoeffer's life and death. As fellow Nazi-resister Eivind Berggrav writes, "Words are never *mere* words when they are God's. Words are action, contribution, courage, the willingness to take consequences, and finally the willingness to suffer."<sup>42</sup>

As early as 1932, while serving as a campus pastor at the Berlin Technical University in Charlottenburg, Bonhoeffer wrote to the students: "The church . . . needs nothing less than spectators and nothing more than coworkers."<sup>43</sup> The following year Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany. As the German state instigated mass boycotts against Jewish businesses and established the "Aryan Paragraph" of the "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service," which proscribed Jews from holding any position of civil service in Germany, Bonhoeffer published his essay "The Church and the Jewish Question." He outlined possible ways for the church to interact with the state:

[The church] can ask the state whether its actions are legitimate and in accordance with its character as state, i.e., it can throw the state back on its responsibilities. Secondly, it can aid the victims of state action. The church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community.<sup>44</sup> 'Do good to all men.' . . . The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1994), 136–137; see also 185.

<sup>42</sup> Eivind Berggrav, *Man and State* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1951), 307. Berggrav was the Bishop of Oslo (1937–1951) during the Nazi occupation of Norway (1940–1945).

<sup>43</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Aufsatz: Evangelische Studentenseelsorge an der Technischen Hochschule," *Die Technische Hochschule* 99 (1932), 200f., quoted in Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 224. After ten years he was still emphasizing the same: "Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian behaviour." *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 14.

<sup>44</sup> See also Berggrav, *Man and State*, 283–284.

<sup>45</sup> Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 225; cf. 221–230. The essay was apparently completed in April or May 1933 and then originally published in the June issue of *Vormarsch*.

To be more explicit with Bonhoeffer's imagery: When the state crushes its citizens unjustly, the church is to throw itself between the spokes of the wheel in order to stop it!<sup>46</sup>

These beliefs led, in due course, to Bonhoeffer's well-documented participation in attempted tyrannicide. In 1939 he joined the *Abwehr*, military counterintelligence, which was the center of the German resistance against Hitler and the Third Reich. Bonhoeffer's statements from the 1933 article and his subsequent actions from within the state as citizen and officer led to many questions. For example, a co-conspirator "asked Bonhoeffer one evening what he thought about the New Testament passage 'all who take up the sword will perish by the sword' (Matt. 26:52). Bonhoeffer's reply was that the word was valid for their circle too—'we have to accept that we are subject to that judgment, but there is now need of such men as will accept its validity for themselves.'"<sup>47</sup> Confessional Lutherans rightly have questions about Bonhoeffer. Courageous though his words and action might have been, did Bonhoeffer ignore discretion and so lose his life? More significantly, how do such actions conform to Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms?<sup>48</sup> Was not Bonhoeffer's action a violation of this teaching? How can a Christian, much less a pastor, violate the Pauline injunction to submit to the governing authorities (Rom 13:1-5) as Bonhoeffer did?

Bonhoeffer, however, did not believe that his action contradicted the biblical teaching on the two governments. In fact, he invoked this teaching

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Renate Wind, "A Spoke in the Wheel," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 3, no. 8 (August 2003): [11], <http://www.elca.org/jle/article.asp?k=24>. See also Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 272-276, and Renate Wind, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Spoke in the Wheel*, trans. John Bowden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). For a comparison of Karl Barth's and Bonhoeffer's responses to the Aryan Clauses, see Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 230-240, and Jordan J. Ballor "A Time to Tear, A Time to Speak," *Acton Institute PowerBlog*, <http://www.acton.org/blog/index.html?/archives/896-A-Time-to-Tear,-A-Time-to-Speak.html> (May 5, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 530. See also Siemon-Netto, *The Fabricated Luther*, 84-85, 91-98, 148, 183, and 189.

<sup>48</sup> Rather than using the language of "two kingdoms," this doctrine might be better termed the "two realms (or regiments)." See Martin Luther, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed* in LW 45:75-129 and *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved* in LW 46:93-137; J. M. Porter, ed., *Luther: Selected Political Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974); Cameron A. MacKenzie, "The Challenge of History: Luther's Two Kingdoms Theology as a Test Case," *CTQ* 71 (2007): 3-28; Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, especially 1-37; Berggrav, *Man and State*, 300-319; Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 221-230; and CA XVI, XXVIII.

of Luther as the basis of his decision.<sup>49</sup> A few months after writing "The Church and the Jewish Question," Bonhoeffer co-authored "The Bethel Confession" with Hermann Sasse.<sup>50</sup> His goal was to recognize the state and preserve it as such, that is, as legitimate temporal authority: nothing more, but nothing less.<sup>51</sup> Bonhoeffer gives at least four applications of the principle of the state's and church's distinct realms to the situation of Germany and the church under Hitler, and thus supplies reasoning for his ultimate stance and act. First, the Nazi totalitarian state had abdicated its responsibilities to protect the just and legal order. Second, the Nazi state, as temporal government, infringed on church order (the ecclesial realm) by barring those of Jewish ethnicity from ministry and even membership. Third, the Nazi state gave no legal recourse for dissent. With these three points, Bonhoeffer boldly proclaimed that the Nazi state had actually negated itself.<sup>52</sup> Finally, civil disobedience is legitimate (Acts 5:29), but only if marked by a willingness to suffer the consequences, by unselfishness, by sacrifice, and by the corporate conscience.<sup>53</sup>

Another Nazi-antagonist, the Danish Lutheran playwright and pastor Kaj Munk, spoke similarly. In January 1944—the same month that the Nazis dragged him from his home, shot him in the head, and left him dead in a ditch—Munk wrote: "The Scriptures do not say: When your neighbor is smitten on one cheek it is your duty to hold him so that he may be smitten on the other cheek also."<sup>54</sup> No, rather, love does no harm to a neighbor. In his essay, "God and Caesar: 'Christianity Takes Orders from Nobody,'" Munk also wrote:

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. David Mark Whitford, *Tyranny and Resistance: The Magdeburg Confession and the Lutheran Tradition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 103.

<sup>50</sup> See the comments about "The Bethel Confession" in Laurence L. White, "The Cultural Crisis and Lutheran Social Ethics," *Confessional Lutherans Web site*, <http://www.confessionallutherans.org/papers/alwhite.html> (April 17, 1998).

<sup>51</sup> Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 226.

<sup>52</sup> Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 225.

<sup>53</sup> See Charles Ford, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Resistance, and the Two Kingdoms," *Lutheran Forum* 27, no. 3 (1993): 28, and "Luther, Bonhoeffer and Revolution" *Lutheran Forum* 25, no. 4 (1991): 24. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 193–204, 280–297, 327–357; as well as Ford, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Authority" (unpublished paper, January 4, 2004), and "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the German Resistance." This echoes three features of Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross: "first, it is voluntary; second, it is bearing the burden of others; and third, it is done for the sake of Christ." John D. Godsey, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Suffering," *Stauros Notebook* 14, no. 2 (1995), <http://www.stauros.org/notebooks/v14n2a01.html>. See also Berggrav, *Man and State*, 282–283.

<sup>54</sup> Kaj Munk, *Four Sermons* (Blair, NE: Lutheran Publishing House, 1944), 27.

[What] a pretty sort of religion! If only little So-and-So can be kept out of harm's way . . . and find his seat in Heaven, what business of his are his neighbors . . . ? Let it go to Hell! Such would certainly be a religion to the liking of Caesar! Upon such a religion he would be happy to bestow the favors of the state! For such . . . would never cross his path! The name of this religion is – Blasphemy!<sup>55</sup>

So Romans 13, the very same text that is often used against Bonhoeffer, concludes with this summary of the fulfillment of the law: "Love does no harm to a neighbor" (Rom 13:10). Love is neither cautious nor passive; it is active. "Every moment and every situation challenges us to action. . . ."<sup>56</sup> For Bonhoeffer, love meant taking action—jamming the wheel that was crushing his neighbor, church, and nation. He explained, "If you boarded the wrong train, could you get where you wanted by running through the corridor in the opposite direction?"<sup>57</sup>

Bonhoeffer claimed that non-action in the face of the Nazi antichrist<sup>58</sup> would be spiritual suicide; in other words, it would be harmful not only to the Jews and other persecuted ones but also to the Christian church and the self. Thus, in 1940, he would lead the church in this confession of sin:

If my share in this is so small as to seem negligible, that still cannot set my mind at rest . . . but I must acknowledge that precisely my sin is to blame for all. . . . I am guilty of cowardly silence at a time when I ought to have spoken. I am guilty of hypocrisy and untruthfulness in the face of force. I have been lacking in compassion and I have denied the poorest of my brethren. . . . The Church confesses that she has not proclaimed often and clearly enough her message of the one God who has revealed Himself for all times in Jesus Christ and who will tolerate no other gods beside Himself. She confesses her timidity, her evasiveness, her dangerous concessions. She has often been untrue to her office of guardianship and to her office of comfort. . . . She was silent when she should have cried out because the blood of the innocent was crying aloud to heaven. She has failed to speak the right word in the right way and at the right time. She

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<sup>55</sup> Munk, *Four Sermons*, 36. The first of these sermons has also been translated and published under the title "The Cost of Truth," in *Kaj Munk: Playwright, Priest and Patriot*, ed. R. P. Keigwin (London: The Free Danish Publishing House, 1944), 69. Many parallels can be drawn between Bonhoeffer and Munk, see Hans Mikkelsen, "Only the Suffering God Can Help," *Portland Independent Media Center*, <http://portland.indymedia.org/en/2003/12/277367.shtml> (December 28, 2003).

<sup>56</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 86.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Theodore J. Kleinhaus, *Till the Night Be Past: The Life and Times of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 128. See also Berggrav, *Man and State*, 308.

<sup>58</sup> On this use of the term "antichrist," see Siemon-Netto, "Welcome Back, Dietrich," 16; Berggrav, *Man and State*, 305–306; and Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 722.



has not resisted to the uttermost the apostasy of faith, and she has brought upon herself the guilt of the godlessness of the masses. The Church confesses that she has taken in vain the name of Jesus Christ, for she has been ashamed of this name before the world and she has not striven forcefully enough against the misuse of this name for an evil purpose. She has stood by while violence and wrong were being committed under cover of this name. . . . The Church confesses that she has witnessed the lawless application of brutal force, the physical and spiritual suffering of countless innocent people, oppression, hatred, and murder, and that she has not raised her voice on behalf of the victims and has not found ways to hasten to their aid. She is guilty of the deaths of the weakest and most defenseless brothers of Jesus Christ. . . . The Church must confess that she has desired security, peace, and quiet, possessions and honor, to which she had no right. . . . She has not borne witness to the truth of God. . . . By her own silence she has rendered herself guilty of the decline in responsible action, in bravery in the defence of a cause, and in willingness to suffer for what is known to be right. She bears the guilt of the defection of the governing authority from Christ.<sup>59</sup>

Upon confession of guilt, justification and renewal result. This renewal finds its place very much in the world. Bonhoeffer wrote, "Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. . . . On the Cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There is his commission, his work."<sup>60</sup> For Bonhoeffer there is a "profound this-worldliness" of Christianity, as he explained in a prison letter to his best friend,<sup>61</sup> relative, and future biographer Eberhard Bethge:

I don't mean the shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable, or 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. . . . [It is] only by living completely in this world that one learns to live by faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be saint or converted sinner or churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties,

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<sup>59</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 112–115. This is part of a section titled "Guilt, Justification and Renewal" on pages 110–119.

<sup>60</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 17. Bonhoeffer then quotes Luther: "The Kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. . . . If Christ had done what you are doing [dwelling only among friends] who would ever have been spared?" *Life Together*, 17–18.

<sup>61</sup> See Bethge, *Friendship and Resistance: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), especially "Bonhoeffer's Theology of Friendship," 80–104.

problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing, we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world—watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is *metanoia*; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian (cf. Jer 45!).<sup>62</sup>

For Bonhoeffer, “this-worldliness” was deeply incarnational (as indicated by his reference to John 1:14).<sup>63</sup> According to Charles Ford, Bonhoeffer’s “this-worldly” activity in the German resistance was an attempt to draw the attention of the allied nations to Nazi atrocities and to encourage allied support of the German resistance.<sup>64</sup>

Although Lutherans may come to different conclusions regarding the appropriateness of Bonhoeffer’s actions, I am convinced that Bonhoeffer’s assistance with the assassination plots against Hitler was an act done in Christian faith and love within God’s left-hand regiment. Uwe Siemon-Netto has designated Bonhoeffer as a martyr—not of the right-hand but of the left-hand realm.<sup>65</sup> He acted as a dutiful German citizen, returning in July 1939 to his native country from the United States just prior to the outbreak of war. In deciding this, Bonhoeffer said:

I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people. My brethren in the Confessing Synod wanted me to go [to the United States]. They may have been right in urging me to do so; but I was wrong in going. Such a decision each person must make for him- or herself. Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilisation may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilisation. I know which of these alternatives I have to choose; but I cannot make the choice in security.<sup>66</sup>

Bonhoeffer acted to protect his nation, neighbor, and the church from a ruler turned robber and murderer. According to Siemon-Netto, “Bonhoeffer explained himself with the quintessentially Lutheran imperative: ‘Sin boldly! [*pecca fortiter*].’ This advice to citizens of the secular

<sup>62</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 369–370; cf. 393.

<sup>63</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 286–287.

<sup>64</sup> Ford, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the German Resistance,” 2.

<sup>65</sup> Siemon-Netto, “Bonhoeffer, a Bold Sinner.”

<sup>66</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Way to Freedom: Letters, Lectures and Notes, 1935–1939 from the Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 246. See also Wind, “A Spoke in the Wheel,” [18].

realm is often ripped out of context and then becomes a dreadful cliché to be used against Luther. . . . But when quoted in full, it really sums up how, according to Luther, a Christian should live in this world."<sup>67</sup>

Luther himself, in his *Warning to His Dear German People* (1531), explicitly sanctioned armed resistance by individual Christian citizens against a corrupt monarch who is acting in violation of all divine and human law:

[I]f war breaks out—which God forbid—I will not reprove those who defend themselves against the murderous and bloodthirsty papists, nor let anyone else rebuke them as being seditious, but I will accept their action and let it pass as self-defense. I will direct them in this matter to the law and to the jurists. For in such an instance, when the murderers and bloodhounds wish to wage war and to murder, it is in truth no insurrection to rise against them and defend oneself.<sup>68</sup>

Luther maintained that the church itself should certainly never resort to weapons.<sup>69</sup> New situations required a new application of this principle. Violent anarchy would result if the citizens, including Christian citizens, were left defenseless. Even in such a situation a Christian citizen "could not raise a weapon of defense against the rioter . . . in the name of the church. At this point the Christian citizen is no higher than the second table. He exists in that situation not as a child of God but as one who is subject to civil authority. . . . His responsibility is to the law."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Siemon-Netto, *The Fabricated Luther*, 84–85; cf. 103 n. 106. "[I]f grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are [in this world] we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness, but, as Peter says (2 Pe. 3:13), we look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." Martin Luther, Letter to Philip Melanchthon, Wartburg, August 1, 1521 in *LW* 48:279. Luther, of course, was not against a Pauline view of sin, grace, and the redeemed life. What he advocated, and the way in which Bonhoeffer appropriated it, was that the Christian life is active and not a "spectator sport." Indeed, Christian love is action. See also Carter Lindberg, foreword to Whitford, *Tyranny and Resistance*, 10.

<sup>68</sup> Luther, *Warning to His Dear German People* in *LW* 47:19–20. On Luther's position, see also Berggrau, *Man and State*, 315.

<sup>69</sup> Luther, *Temporal Authority* (1523), *LW* 45:75–129.

<sup>70</sup> Berggrau, *Man and State*, 315. Berggrau argues that this "responsibility to the law" was the argument used by Luther when the Smalcald League was created. *Man and State*, 315–316. See Whitford, *Tyranny and Resistance*. For example, Luther made this statement in 1538: "If the emperor undertakes war he will be a tyrant and will oppose our ministry and religion, and then he will also oppose our civil and domestic life. Here there is no question whether it's permissible to fight for one's faith. On the contrary, it's

Hitler opposed the law in civil and domestic life and, via the Aryan clause, opposed the ministry and religion. Bonhoeffer was acting out of Christian love for the neighbor, focusing on the neighbor's needs.<sup>71</sup> About his own actions, Bonhoeffer said, "[R]eason dictates that we must do this, and then of course we must still turn to God for forgiveness in Christ."<sup>72</sup> The question, however, was not one of submission; it could not be. All means of non-violent dissent and protest had been removed by the Nazis: distribution of various written materials (free press), opportunity for public speaking and lecturing (free speech), peaceable assembly, the petitioning of government, and open elections. The question is not "Was Bonhoeffer's action sinful?" — as if an answer to this would finally resolve the issue — but rather "Of the choices before him, all 'sinful,'<sup>73</sup> what should he have done?" Though the action was difficult, the question was not difficult to answer. According to Bethge, they "just assumed as a matter of course that as followers of Christ, they could not possibly allow themselves to become accomplices in the slaughter of Jews and all the other horrible things that were going on in Germany."<sup>74</sup>

Bonhoeffer's action grew out of his theology of the cross, as well as his understanding of baptism, prayer, and the call to discipleship.<sup>75</sup> In this he found true freedom: "freedom from the fear of decision, freedom from fear to act."<sup>76</sup>

#### IV. Community

For Bonhoeffer, though, this freedom was always bound up in action within and to the community. It was outwardly directed, corporately understood, and communally lived.

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necessary to fight for one's children and family." *Table Talk* in *LIV* 54:278–279. Those who espouse quietism in the face of despotism must look elsewhere than the mature Luther.

<sup>71</sup> On Luther's view of service to the neighbor, see Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 153–154. See also Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 298, and *Ethics*, 299–313, where he discusses the uses of the law.

<sup>72</sup> As recounted by Bethge in Siemon-Netto, "Welcome Back, Dietrich," 16.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 362–363.

<sup>74</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge, *A Third Testament* (Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 2002), 157.

<sup>75</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 299–300. The scriptural support for Bonhoeffer's action is simply the biblical concept of love for neighbor. Bonhoeffer wrote: "The Christian is called to sympathy and action, not in the first place by his own sufferings, but by the sufferings of his brethren, for whose sake Christ suffered." *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 276. See also Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 14.

Freedom from something experiences its fulfillment [sic] only in freedom for something. Freedom for freedom's sake, however, leads to anarchy. Biblically, freedom means: freedom for service to God and the neighbor, freedom for obedience to the commands of God . . . Freedom is not primarily an individual right but a responsibility, freedom is not primarily oriented to the individual but to the neighbor. . . .<sup>77</sup>

The call to discipleship naturally meant community: the call being, for Bonhoeffer, baptism (that is, incorporation into Christ and his church).

Bonhoeffer's classic statement on community is *Life Together*,<sup>78</sup> which was written in the setting of an illegal seminary at Finkenwalde. One of the students, Gerhard Lehne, described the community of this seminary-life "as a 'brotherhood under the Word, irrespective of the person,' with an 'open-mindedness and love for everything that still makes this fallen creation loveable—music, literature, sport, and the beauty of the earth—a grand way of life.'"<sup>79</sup> The seminary was opened in April 1935, moved to Finkenwalde in June 1935, and closed by the Gestapo in September 1937. The themes explored by *Life Together* are the day with others, the day alone, intercession, quiet and solitude, service, private confession,<sup>80</sup> and the Lord's Supper.

The continuity, consistency, and interrelatedness in Bonhoeffer's thought are clear; the themes of suffering, prayer, and action also find a home in Bonhoeffer's discussion of community:

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Thus the law of Christ is a law of bearing. Bearing means forbearing and sustaining. The brother is a burden to the Christian, precisely because he

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<sup>77</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Gedanken," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, *Ökumene: Briefe, Aufsätze, Dokumente. 1928–1942*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1958), 359, quoted in Ford, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Resistance, and the Two Kingdoms," 32 (emphasis original).

<sup>78</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993). This edition is subtitled: "The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community." *Life Together* was written in a single four-week stretch in 1938, with breaks only for tennis and a music festival. Geoffrey B. Kelly, "Editor's Introduction to the English Edition," in *DBW 5:4. Life Together*, with *Prayer Book*, is Bonhoeffer's finest work. According to Maria von Wedemeyer, his fiancée, while in prison Bonhoeffer himself "claimed that the only [book of his] of concern to him at that moment was *Life Together*." Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 416.

<sup>79</sup> David McL. Gracie, introduction to "Meditation on Psalm 119," in Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 103.

<sup>80</sup> On private confession, see Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (1954), 110–122. This should be understood in the historical context of the preachers' seminary at Finkenwalde, as well as James 5:16.

is a Christian. For the pagan the other person never becomes a burden at all. He simply sidesteps every burden that others may impose on him. The Christian, however, must bear the burden of a brother. He must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated. The burden of men was so heavy for God Himself that He had to endure the Cross. God verily bore the burden of men in the body of Jesus Christ. But He bore them as a mother carries her child, as a shepherd enfolds the lost lamb that has been found. God took men upon Himself and they weighted him to the ground, but God remained with them and they with God. In bearing with men God maintained community with them. It is the law of Christ that was fulfilled in the Cross. And Christians must share in this law. They must suffer their brethren, but, what is more important, now that the law of Christ has been fulfilled, they *can* bear with their brethren.<sup>81</sup>

Believers bear each other's burdens in time and space, and also in intercessory forgiving prayer, even as Christ bore the sins of all.<sup>82</sup> This focus on community did not preclude Bonhoeffer's feelings of isolation at times. While in prison, Bonhoeffer yearned for family and friends; he felt alone even among his fellow prisoners. He expressed these emotions on community, self-identity, and God in his poem "Who Am I?":

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.  
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.<sup>83</sup>

### V. Excursus: Bonhoeffer's Non-Religious Language

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Bonhoeffer is his prison-cell musings on so-called non-religious language. These reflections on a "non-religious interpretation of Christianity" have caused as much, or more, controversy and debate than even his resistance to Nazi totalitarianism. Bonhoeffer used the phrase "non-religious Christianity" only once, in order to ask a hypothetical question regarding its definition.<sup>84</sup> Bethge maintains that Bonhoeffer's more common phrase was "'nonreligious interpretation,' [which] means Christological interpretation. It might not mean that for others, but it did for Bonhoeffer."<sup>85</sup> Bonhoeffer specifically

<sup>81</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 100–101. See also Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 95, 98–99, and *Cost of Discipleship*, 110.

<sup>82</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 102–103.

<sup>83</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 347–348.

<sup>84</sup> This is the correct translation of the phrase found in a 30 April 1944 letter to Bethge in Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 280.

<sup>85</sup> H. Elliott Wright, "Aftermath of Flossenbürg: Bonhoeffer, 1947–1970: An Interview with Eberhard Bethge," *Christian Century* 87 (May 27, 1970): 657.

references justification, and uses Paul and circumcision as an analogy: "The Pauline question whether [circumcision] is a condition of<sup>86</sup> justification seems to me in present-day terms to be whether religion is a condition of salvation."<sup>87</sup> Bonhoeffer, however, nowhere defines "religion" or "develops any closed theory of religion,"<sup>88</sup> though he seems to equate it with the outward trappings, the externals, even the anthropocentric and self-righteous elements of worship. Nonetheless, he does not systematically identify it. "It seems that Bonhoeffer is using the word 'religion' in a way that not only makes a definition of its content difficult, but often does not even try to provide any such definition."<sup>89</sup> This makes "the large number of misinterpretations understandable, all of which presuppose Bonhoeffer to be operating with a fixed concept of religion and then on the basis of this presupposition attempt to explain the nonreligious interpretation."<sup>90</sup>

Bonhoeffer was struggling with how to present the gospel to an increasingly secularized world, that is, with evangelism and catechesis.

The day will come . . . when men will once more be called so to utter the word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it. It will be a new language, perhaps quite non-religious, 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 a new righteousness and truth, proclaiming God's peace with men and the coming of his kingdom. . . . (Jer. 33.9).<sup>91</sup>

Bonhoeffer did not give up traditional, biblical terminology.<sup>92</sup> Charles Ford notes that

leading figures in the resistance, including members of [his] own family, were motivated by nineteenth century liberal thought and far from Christianity. It was specifically to address the latter that Bonhoeffer wanted to develop a "non-religious" interpretation of Christianity. In approaching the liberal resistance, Bonhoeffer wanted to present

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<sup>86</sup> This phrase, in both instances in this sentence, could be translated "prerequisite for." Ralf K. Wüstenberg, *A Theology of Life: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 25.

<sup>87</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 281.

<sup>88</sup> Some attempts include "human yearning [and striving] for God" and "cheap grace." Wüstenberg, *A Theology of Life*, 8, 14; cf. Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 45–48.

<sup>89</sup> Wüstenberg, *A Theology of Life*, 27.

<sup>90</sup> Wüstenberg, *A Theology of Life*, 297.

<sup>91</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 300.

<sup>92</sup> See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 881; cf. Bonhoeffer, *Reflections on the Bible: Human Word and Word of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 83.

Christianity gradually in ways that addressed issues which they were encountering.<sup>93</sup>

He was attempting to formulate an evangelistic paradigm within the context of a catechetical model. Ford states:

In this he appealed to early church tradition in which catechumens were asked to leave the liturgy before Holy Communion. His "non-religious" language for Christianity was like a catechism. At some point the catechumens will be ready for traditional Christian language. One can notice how members of his family came gradually to speak traditional Christian language, especially as they faced execution.<sup>94</sup>

Ford also points out that after his "reflections on 'non-religious' language, Bonhoeffer himself returned to traditional language after the failure of the attempted assassination of Hitler. 'My past life is brim-full of God's goodness and my sins are covered by the forgiving love of Christ crucified.'"<sup>95</sup>

It must be kept in mind that Bonhoeffer was discussing and asking questions on nonreligious interpretation in personal letters from jail to his best friend. On one occasion he wrote to Bethge: "You would be surprised, and perhaps even worried, by my theological thoughts and the conclusions they lead to; and this is where I miss you most of all, because I don't know anyone else with whom I could so well discuss them to have my thinking clarified."<sup>96</sup> On another occasion he wrote, "Forgive me for still putting it all so terribly clumsily and badly, as I really feel I am. But perhaps you will help me again to make things clearer and simpler, even if only by my being able to talk about them with you and to hear you, so to speak, keep asking and answering."<sup>97</sup>

## VI. Conclusion

Bonhoeffer is not without faults, so it is fitting to consider briefly some of his shortcomings. Though he believed in the inspiration of the original text, in regard to Scripture he was not an inerrantist,<sup>98</sup> which is not a

<sup>93</sup> Ford, e-mail to author, June 18, 2006. Also published as "Luther and Bonhoeffer Misunderstood," *Christian News* (New Haven, MO), July 3, 2006, 23. Some have called these leading figures in the resistance, whom Bonhoeffer was trying to reach, "homesick humanists."

<sup>94</sup> Ford, e-mail to author, June 18, 2006.

<sup>95</sup> Ford, e-mail to author, June 18, 2006.

<sup>96</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 279.

<sup>97</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 362.

<sup>98</sup> He believed in the inspiration of the original text. See Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 322.



surprise considering the German milieu in which he was born and bred.<sup>99</sup> Bonhoeffer, however, was no higher critic—a discipline that he considered more or less useless for meeting the world on its own terms and for the purpose it was intended.<sup>100</sup> Rather, he read the Bible faithfully, meditatively, prayerfully,<sup>101</sup> and christocentrically, pondering each word in a passage,<sup>102</sup> sometimes for days or even weeks.<sup>103</sup> He also preached from the Bible.<sup>104</sup> Not surprisingly Bonhoeffer has been labeled in opposite ways by different people. One considers him a radical; another, a biblicist.<sup>105</sup> He was neither. He was a man of the word of God. His “view on the relationship between revelation and Scripture is that revelation takes place by means of the Holy Spirit who works through the text of Scripture, the presentation of Christ in the proclaimed word, and also the sacraments.”<sup>106</sup> Bonhoeffer could have given more frequent attention to sacramental

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<sup>99</sup> Hermann Sasse had to overcome the same barriers and, granted a longer life, he did so. According to Robert Kolb and Charles Ford, while visiting Concordia Seminary in 1964, Sasse called Bonhoeffer a wonderful young Lutheran theologian and said, “The longer he lived the more Lutheran he became.” Two of Bonhoeffer’s latest complete works intended for publication were his best: *Life Together* (1939) and *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible* (1940).

<sup>100</sup> See Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 44.

<sup>101</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 84–85.

<sup>102</sup> “The Gospel . . . never speaks a superfluous word.” Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 43. See also Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 204.

<sup>103</sup> See Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, especially 30–41. No interruptions should be allowed during this quiet time; it should precede all other activities of the day. Bonhoeffer’s claim to “need help against the ungodly haste and unrest which threaten my work as a pastor” rings true for all. Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 31.

<sup>104</sup> As an example of his approach, see Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

<sup>105</sup> For example, see Kleinhans, *Till the Night Be Past*, 64. See especially Bonhoeffer, “The Bible Alone” in *Meditating on the Word*, 40–48; Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 204–206; Bonhoeffer, *Reflections on the Bible*; and Joel Shaltanis, *The Interpretation of Scripture in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (unpublished paper, Concordia Seminary, 2006), in which the author argues that Bonhoeffer must be understood in light of three distinct periods: pre-1931 (pre-conversion [see, e.g., Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 202–206]), ca. 1932–1943, and 1943–1945 (imprisonment). One could even divide the second phase into two sub-periods: ca. 1932–1937 and ca. 1937–1943, as Bonhoeffer himself indicates a break in comments on the writing of *Cost of Discipleship* (1937). Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 369–370. For a brief overview of Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic from a confessional Lutheran perspective see Timo Laato, *Romarbrevets Hermeneutik* (Gothenburg: Forsamlingsforlaget, 2006), especially 38–44, though Laato focuses on *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer’s doctoral dissertation (habilitation thesis) written in 1930. By 1932, Bonhoeffer, in a personal letter, mentioned he had himself “taken quite a dislike to [the dissertation].” Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 149.

<sup>106</sup> Shaltanis, *Interpretation of Scripture*, n.p.

theology in his writing, even though he considered baptism and the Lord's Supper to be foundational and essential.<sup>107</sup>

Occasionally, Bonhoeffer shows an attraction to pacifism.<sup>108</sup> In *Ethics*, however, Bonhoeffer defends war as a necessary reality.<sup>109</sup> According to Jordan J. Ballor, "The idea that Bonhoeffer was ever a pure pacifist is incorrect. [H]e did have lifelong affinities for the position, however. Bethge relates Bonhoeffer's great interest in Gandhi's methods of nonviolent protest, for example."<sup>110</sup> Some maintain that the early Bonhoeffer was a pacifist who was forced to change course due to the rise of Hitler. Ballor argues against the view that Bonhoeffer began as a pacifist but changed after the rise of Hitler by citing from an early work, *Sanctorum Communio*: "Where a people, submitting in conscience to God's will, goes to war in order to fulfill its historical purpose and mission in the world though entering fully into the ambiguity of human sinful action—it knows it has been called upon by God, that history is to be made; here war is no longer murder."<sup>111</sup> Ballor concludes, "Many attempts to cast Bonhoeffer as a pacifist fit more with later interpreters' thoughts about what they wish Bonhoeffer would have done or should have done, rather than the realities of his positions and actions."<sup>112</sup>

Finally, although *Life Together*, his *Prayerbook*, and other works are highly recommended, *Christ the Center* is not. Despite its helpful summary of christological heresies, it is the least useful, the weakest stylistically, and perhaps the least orthodox of his books.<sup>113</sup> Bonhoeffer also offered this caution about *The Cost of Discipleship*: "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 see the dangers of that book,

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<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 241–242, and Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 267, and 46–48 for the relationship of "cheap grace" to the sacraments.

<sup>108</sup> As one of several possible examples see Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom*, 95 (1932), but then compare his words in the same year on 99. See also Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 205.

<sup>109</sup> See especially Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 89–110, 154–164, 171–181, 232–236, 244–258. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 223.

<sup>110</sup> Jordan J. Ballor, e-mail to the Bonhoeffer's Cell yahoo e-group, November 16, 2004.

<sup>111</sup> Ballor, e-mail to the Bonhoeffer's Cell yahoo e-group, November 16, 2004. For a different translation of the same statement, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, in *DBW* 1:119.

<sup>112</sup> Ballor, e-mail to the Bonhoeffer's Cell yahoo e-group, November 16, 2004.

<sup>113</sup> *Christ the Center* is based on lecture notes from the summer of 1933, during Bonhoeffer's transition to what he would simply term Christianity. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 205.

though I still stand by what I wrote."<sup>114</sup> Due to its depth and its sometimes subtle, though proper, distinction of law and gospel and of obedience and faith,<sup>115</sup> it is best read only by the mature, discerning Christian.<sup>116</sup> There is no doubt that Bonhoeffer was broken and twisted: a sinner conceived, born, and living after the fall. He simply cannot measure up to the expectation that he should be something other than this.<sup>117</sup>

There is really only one focus for Bonhoeffer, one theme among these interconnected cruciform themes of suffering, prayer, action, and community: Christ. His last recorded words—"This is the end, but for me it is the beginning of life"<sup>118</sup>—and the text for his last sermon—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3)<sup>119</sup>—provided a fitting close to his life.

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<sup>114</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 369.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 63.

<sup>116</sup> See Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 312.

<sup>117</sup> See his reflections on being a pastor in Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 109.

<sup>118</sup> John W. Doberstein, introduction to Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 13.

<sup>119</sup> The text was for Quasimodogeniti Sunday (First Sunday after Easter), April 8, 1945. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 926–927. See also Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 370–371.