

# Obedience or Resistance: The Legacy of Bonhoeffer

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## SUMMARY

This article surveys the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the eminent German theologian, distinguishing three periods in his life and theological development. The first period is called *Bonhoeffer Theologian* (paragraph 1 below) and covers his youth, his study of theology, his vicariate in Barcelona and teaching at the University of Berlin (1906-1931). The second period, *Bonhoeffer Christian* (paragraphs 2-7), shows his new understanding of the Bible (including the Sermon on the Mount) and the relationship between Church and State. It also

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Aufsatz befasst sich mit dem Leben und der Theologie des bedeutenden deutschen Theologen Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Es werden dabei drei Perioden seines Lebens und seiner theologischen Entwicklung unterschieden: Die erste Periode heißt *Bonhoeffer als Theologe* (Teil 1) und schließt seine Kindheit, Studium der Theologie, Vikariat in Barcelona und theologische Lehrtätigkeit an der Universität von Berlin ein (1906-1931). Die zweite Periode, *Bonhoeffer als Christ*, ist in den Teilen 2-7 enthalten. Sie zeigen Bonhoeffers neues Bibelverständnis (einschließlich der Bergpredigt), sein Verständnis der Beziehung zwischen Kirche und

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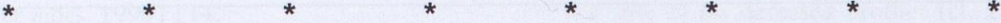
## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente la vie et la pensée de l'éminent théologien allemand qu'était Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Trois périodes de sa vie et de sa maturation théologique sont distinguées. La première, qu'on peut désigner comme celle du *Bonhoeffer théologien*, couvre sa jeunesse, ses études de théologie, son poste de vicaire à Barcelone et son professorat à l'université de Berlin (1906-1931). La deuxième période, celle du *Bonhoeffer chrétien*, fait état de sa compréhension nouvelle de la Bible (notamment le sermon sur la montagne) et de sa nouvelle approche de la relation entre l'Église et l'État. L'auteur traite alors de son rejet du manifeste aryen et de ses conceptions

discusses his rejection of the Aryan paragraph and his concept of Christianity, theology and the Church as demonstrated in the theological works written in the Confessing Church (1932-1939). The third period, *Bonhoeffer Contemporary* (1939-1945; paragraphs 8-10), shows the theological and ethical background of his involvement in the attempts at violent removal of Hitler and the importance of non-religious interpretation for Christian churches behind the Iron Curtain. It expresses Bonhoeffer's hope in the future renewal of the Church and his personal feelings, coping with the death in prison.

Staat sowie seine Ablehnung des Arierparagraphen; sie bezeugen auch sein Verständnis des Christentums, der Theologie und der Kirche anhand der theologischen Werke geschrieben in der Zeit der Bekennenden Kirche (1932-1939). Teile 8-10 handeln über *Bonhoeffer als Zeitgenosse* und zeigen die theologischen und ethischen Voraussetzungen seiner Beteiligung am Versuch einer gewaltsamen Beseitigung Hitlers. Sie beleuchten auch die theologische Bedeutung der nichtreligiösen Interpretation biblischer Begriffe für die christlichen Kirchen hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang, Bonhoeffers Hoffnung auf die zukünftige Erneuerung der Kirche und seine persönlichen Gefühle während er im Gefängnis auf den Tod wartete.

relatives au christianisme, à la théologie et à l'Église telles qu'elles apparaissent dans les ouvrages théologiques rédigés dans le cadre de l'Église confessante (1932-1939). Dans la partie de l'article correspondant à la troisième période, celle du *Bonhoeffer contemporain* (1939-1945), l'auteur expose l'arrière-plan théologique et éthique qui a conduit Bonhoeffer à participer à des tentatives d'attentats contre Hitler et montre l'importance d'une interprétation non religieuse pour les Églises chrétiennes derrière le rideau de fer. Il présente l'espoir d'un futur renouveau de l'Église entretenu par Bonhoeffer, ainsi que les sentiments qu'il a éprouvés alors qu'il attendait la mort en prison.



## 1. Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) is a widely known German Protestant theologian, whom I regard as a second Jan Hus,<sup>1</sup> because like Hus he sought the spiritual, moral and political renewal of Church and society on the basis of the Holy Scriptures as they understood it in their time.<sup>2</sup> Both theologians faced conflicts with the church, but whereas Hus struggled to restore the powerful medieval church in Bohemia, Bonhoeffer struggled for spiritual renewal of the churches of the Reformation, which had departed from the heritage of Martin Luther and whose nature and mission were endangered by the racist, anti-Semitic ideology of National Socialism. Hus and Bonhoeffer both died as martyrs: Hus was condemned to death mainly by the church's powers but Bonhoeffer was executed by the state.

Bonhoeffer was born in Breslau (then in Germany, now in Poland) as the last of eight children. Shortly after his birth the Bonhoeffer family moved to Berlin where Dietrich's father, Karl Bonhoeffer, was professor of psychiatry and neurology until his death. Bonhoeffer's mother Paula, née von Hase, devoted herself completely to the upbringing of her children. She instilled in them a deep love for Christian values. She had 'spent the period of her youth in Herrnhut and she has opened here to the spiritual ideals of the Moravian Church with a youthful passion'. She mediated to young Dietrich basic biblical knowledge by 'telling him biblical stories by heart' and she also acquainted him with church history.<sup>3</sup>

In his theological studies, Bonhoeffer was initially influenced by the biblical scholar Adolf Schlatter. At the University of Berlin (1923-1927) he had to deal with the prominent liberal theologians Adolf von Harnack and Reinhold Seeberg. At this time, the dialectic theology of Karl Barth began to develop<sup>4</sup> but Bonhoeffer was most influenced by Martin Luther's theology: the justification by faith and grace alone as the article by which the Church stands or falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*), Luther's understanding of the Holy Scriptures, and his concept of the Church as Christ's presence on earth. Later, when he was active in the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer discovered the connection between justification, obedience and the priesthood of all believers which is present in his teaching at the Preachers' Seminary of the Confessing Church in Finkenwalde.

In his *Ethics* he critically interacts with Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms (die Lehre von den zwei Reichen) and points out that Jesus Christ is the Lord of both kingdoms (Mat 28:18-20, Col 1:15-20, Eph 1:22-23). In prison, Bonhoeffer wrote:

One wonders why Luther's action had to be followed by consequences that were the exact opposite of what he intended, and that darkened the last years of his life, so that he sometimes even doubted the value of his life's work. He wanted a real unity of the church and the West – that is, of the Christian peoples, and the consequence was the disintegration of the church and of Europe; he wanted the 'freedom of the Christian man', and the consequence was indifference and licentiousness...<sup>5</sup>

In 1927 Bonhoeffer completed his theological studies in Berlin with the thesis *Sanctorum Communio*.<sup>6</sup> After a year's vicariate in Barcelona (1928-1929), he returned to Berlin where he began lecturing in systematic theology. In 1930 he defended his habilitation entitled *Act and Being* and qualified as assistant professor of systematic theology.<sup>7</sup> His lectures focused on Christology, ecclesiology, anthropology and contemporary ethical problems.<sup>8</sup> The years 1932-1939 are often called *Bonhoeffer Christian*; the period called *Bonhoeffer Contemporary* started with his return from the United States in 1939.

## 2. Search for a new theological-ethical orientation (1928-1932)

Shortly after Bonhoeffer completed his dissertation, he began to deal with theological-ethical issues and to look for a new theological orientation. His search started in Barcelona and ended in 1932. In a lecture in Barcelona entitled *Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity* he mentions the crisis of human ideals that shaped the European cultural, pedagogical and philosophical tradition:

The great internal split of our ideals, of our human establishments and structures brings us daily the question: What should we do? Daily we have to make decisions between one and the other ideal, no matter whether of political or educational nature, or in questions of forming our own life. Political statements of any ideals are deeply shaken in their foundations.<sup>9</sup>

In his view, the crisis also affects society and politics. In the same lecture he asks regarding the fate of Europe: 'Who among us dares to give a definite answer as to the purpose of the present fate of Europe, who dares to say that he found the only valid answer to this question?'<sup>10</sup> In a sermon on 8 May 1932 he explicitly says that there is a time of 'great dying of Christianity' and that European Christianity has lost its purpose.<sup>11</sup>

There are three main symptoms of crisis in Christianity: theological incompetence to understand the ethical meaning of God's commands for the Christian life, inability to apply God's commandments to a life of different occupations, and inability to cope with the theological significance of the Sermon on the Mount. In a public lecture in 1929 Bonhoeffer emphasised that 'the greatest misunderstanding of the Sermon on the Mount is when we apply it literally to the present'. That is 'meaningless because it is not feasible' and 'it is against the Spirit of Christ, which brought freedom from the law'. Such an attempt overlooks that the apostle Paul said, 'for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life' (2 Cor 3:6).<sup>12</sup>

His years of searching for a new theological orientation resulted in a personal change which is known as *Bonhoeffer Christian*. In his own words to a female co-worker in the church in 1936:

I plunged into work in a very unchristian way. An ... ambition that many noticed in me made my life difficult. ... Then something happened, something that has changed and transformed my life to the present day. For the first time I discovered the Bible ... I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the church, spoken and preached about it – but I had not yet become a Christian. ... I know that at that time I turned the doctrine of Jesus Christ into something of personal advantage to myself ... I pray to God that will never not happen again. Also I had never prayed, or I prayed only very little. For all my loneliness, I was quite pleased with myself. Then the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount, freed me from that. Since then everything has changed. ... It was a great liberation. It became clear to me that the life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the church, and step by step it became clearer to me how far does that must go. Then came the crisis of 1933. ... The revival of the church and of the ministry became my supreme concern. ... I suddenly saw the Christian pacifism that I had

recently passionately opposed as self-evident...<sup>13</sup>

This change Bonhoeffer considered as an inseparable part 'of God's good and provident guidance'.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Three boundaries of the Church

The topic of boundaries comes up in Bonhoeffer's small publication *Das Wesen der Kirche* (*The Essence of the Church*), which consists of his lectures at the University of Berlin in the summer semester of 1932. The booklet contains a short section called 'The boundaries of the Church'.<sup>15</sup> Here he states that the Church is located in a world that 'knows nothing of God's revelation in the Church'. Therefore it is important to talk about the inner boundaries of the Church which are expressed by the terms predestination, the Kingdom of God and the state.

The *doctrine of predestination* is based on the a priori assumption that God has from eternity chosen certain people to eternal salvation, others to damnation. Against this understanding Bonhoeffer emphasises that 'the church is built on the word of the Cross of Christ', which also includes God's love for all humankind as it is confirmed in Jesus' Great Commission (Mat 28:18-20), according to which 'the Church must preach the word of God without reservation' and call all people to Christ.<sup>16</sup> The doctrine of predestination a priori limits the breadth of God's love for sinful humans.

With respect to the second boundary, *the Kingdom of God*, Bonhoeffer refuses to identify Church and Kingdom, although the Church 'knows who it belongs to'. She knows the will of God, 'who desires everyone to be saved' (1 Tim 2:4). Therefore the Church does missionary work in the world; 'the Church does not know who belongs to the Kingdom of God', 'she hopes that God can do great and mysterious things with those who do not belong to the Church', but she does not know, 'when, where and how God's will arrives to its ultimate goal'.<sup>17</sup> In Bonhoeffer's view, the Kingdom of God is a term that includes in itself all human races, cultures, religions, Christian churches and state institutions. It is present in the Church in Christ through the Holy Spirit, but it transcends the visible organisational and institutional structures of the Church.

With regard to the third boundary, *the state*, Bonhoeffer argues that the state tells the Church

that God has not given her the judicial sword of violence. Her sword is Word and prayer alone. Thus the Church serves the state. Even though the state might threaten her, she fights only with the weapons of Word and prayer, and her goal is 'the proclaiming of God's rule over the whole world through word and faith'. But Bonhoeffer speaks of a limit to obedience 'where the state threatens the word'. In such a situation, the 'church's criticism of the state is needed'.<sup>18</sup> Bonhoeffer does not yet develop this thought here.

In summary, Bonhoeffer's short treatise on the boundaries of the Church emphasises God's sovereign rule over the Church and the state in the world. Both institutions have to exercise their tasks responsibly and peacefully. If the state prevents the proclamation of the Word of God, conflict will arise and the Church can criticise and disobey the state. These thoughts could have helped the state and the Church to coexist peacefully in the turbulent situation in Germany in 1932; they also have a profound significance for our present situation.

#### 4. The Aryan paragraph (1933)

A few months after Hitler's electoral success in 1933 he began to enforce the infamous Aryan Paragraph which was passed by the Reichstag on 7 April 1933. It banned from public service all Jews and persons whose parents or grandparents had been Jewish. The 'Brown Synod' of Prussian church leaders soon adopted it as a condition for acceptance into church ministry.<sup>19</sup>

On the Sunday of the church elections in 1933 Bonhoeffer preached in the Holy Trinity Church in Berlin on Matthew 16:13-18 on the topic 'Peter's Church'. In his sermon he categorically asserted that no organisation builds the Church but only Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.<sup>20</sup>

When the entire Evangelical Church in Germany accepted the Aryan Paragraph, Bonhoeffer informed the Anglican bishop George K.A. Bell about the situation; Bell invited him to come to England, where he became pastor at the German Evangelical Church in Sydenham (London) and the Reformed Church of St. Paul in London (1933-1934). From London Bonhoeffer wrote to his friend Rößler in 1934: 'National socialism has brought an end to the church in Germany.'<sup>21</sup> He began to think about joining the Free Church, but it did not happen. Bonhoeffer's words at this time do not point to resistance but rather express his feelings of personal disappointment.

#### 5. Obedience and disobedience to the state in his Bethel Confession (1934)

Approximately a month after the Protestant Church had adopted the Aryan Paragraph, Bonhoeffer again reflected on the relationship between Church and state in the first draft of the Bethel Confession which influenced the Barmen Confession of 1934. In August 1933 he quotes the *Confessio Augustana*, article 16, and writes about authorities that 'we Christians are bound to be submissive and obedient to the authority'. This does not depend on 'whether the authority is Christian or pagan' but it depends 'on a fair and responsible exercise of its authority', i.e. 'whether it properly exercises its secular office'. Here Bonhoeffer refers to the *Clausula Petri*: when the high priest forbade the apostles to preach Christ, Peter responded with the words, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority' (Acts 5:29).<sup>22</sup>

We see that Bonhoeffer's understanding of obedience and disobedience to the authorities depends on the proper and responsible exercise of secular office as well as on the freedom to proclaim God's Word. If the state prevents this, we pass the limit of obedience. This idea is still relevant in the world today.

#### 6. The Confessing Church

Less than a year after the adoption of the Aryan Paragraph by the church, Protestant church leaders met in Barmen, Westphalia (May 1934). 'Here 139 delegates ... coming from twenty-six land and provincial churches, representing Reformed, Lutheran, and United Church bodies', constituted the Confessing Church in Germany. The American Nelson Burton notes:

The initial draft of the confession, written by Karl Barth, was directed against Nazi interference in church affairs and the idolatrous destruction of the gospel through racist policies approved by the German Christians. The primary motif of the confession was the acknowledgment that Jesus Christ alone is Lord and his Word alone saves. The confession repudiated the false teaching that there are areas of ... life in which we belong not to Jesus Christ, but to other lords.<sup>23</sup>

Encouraged by a letter from Barth, Bonhoeffer returned from England and joined the Confessing Church, serving as a leading theologian in the

Preacher Seminary in Finkenwalde during the years 1935-1937. In September of 1937 the seminary was dissolved by the Gestapo.<sup>24</sup> In the beginning Bonhoeffer saw the Confessing Church as the 'one true church of Jesus Christ' in Germany, the continuation of the Reformation, and said that 'after four hundred years of Protestantism the spirit of reformation moves again'. The Confessing Church fought against 'the false Church of Antichrist'.<sup>25</sup> He was convinced that the struggle of the Confessing Church was paradigmatic for Christianity throughout the world: '... we do not fight for the Christian churches in Germany but for the whole world, too. Everywhere can be found the same pagan and antichristian forces...'<sup>26</sup>

### 7. *The Cost of Discipleship*

Bonhoeffer's theology of obedience for the Confessing Church is contained in two theological works: *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*. In this essay I will mainly deal with the concept of obedience as we find it in *The Cost of Discipleship*, which is based on the Sermon on the Mount. From the Sermon Bonhoeffer derived his definition of obedience: '... we could understand and interpret the Sermon on the Mount in a thousand different ways. Jesus knows only one possibility: simple surrender and obedience, not interpreting it or applying it, but doing and obeying'.<sup>27</sup> I will show that his theological-ethical concept of obedience has connections with Christology, faith, soteriology, ecclesiology and state authority.

#### 7.1 Obedience to Jesus Christ

In Jesus Christ 'God was made man, and ... that means that he took upon him our entire human nature with all its infirmity, sinfulness and corruption, the whole of apostate humanity', he is 'the Second Adam or the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45)'. Here Bonhoeffer interprets Luther's kenotic Christology in which Jesus Christ proved his divinity and humanity by obedience, i.e. by 'taking a form of slave ... and became obedient to the point of death (Phil 2:6-11)'.<sup>28</sup> Jesus realised his obedience to God as he 'came to fulfil the law of the old covenant' and so he 'manifests his perfect union with the will of God as revealed in the Old Testament law and prophets'. His obedience led him to death on the cross and it means also that 'Jesus was the only Man who ever fulfilled the law...'<sup>29</sup> He is present in his Church today as 'the incarnate, crucified, risen and glorified Christ, and

he meets us in his word', which the Holy Spirit actualises.<sup>30</sup>

#### 7.2 Faith and obedience

Faith as a personal obedient relationship with God has its origin in Christ: 'It is only the call of Jesus which makes it a situation where faith is possible.' At this point Bonhoeffer emphasizes the mutuality of faith and obedience: 'Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes'.<sup>31</sup>

#### 7.3 Soteriology

Bonhoeffer speaks in this context about 'costly and cheap grace'.<sup>32</sup> These two concepts do not characterise the quality of God's grace but they express the two potential attitudes of individual Christians as well as the Church towards God's gift of forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. Church history confirms the presence of both attitudes. 'Costly grace' is the adequate response by which the Church should live. It is the personal faith which has in itself a life in obedience to Jesus Christ as a responsible answer to God's grace. Costly grace forces us to accept the yoke of following Jesus Christ and it brings fellowship with Christ in all life situations including suffering because of Christ.

'Cheap grace', on the other hand, is inadequate and unpardonable. 'Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth.'<sup>33</sup> In a cheap relation to Christ, the Christian does not find justification; it talks about it and offers it but it is a false offer – a ruining of the unique opportunity God gives to all people. 'Cheap grace means grace as a good below cost, wasted forgiveness, consolation and holiness.' A cheap attitude towards the gospel is 'the main enemy' of every church, Bonhoeffer argues.<sup>34</sup>

Bonhoeffer's emphasis was indispensable for Christian proclamation in the past and it is still relevant. Firstly because true faith in Jesus Christ as a permanent relationship with God can never be inherited or learned, but it can be only accepted through the preached word of God in the Church as the place of Christ presence. Secondly, each person's relationship to God permanently evolves. It is necessary to understand the will of God as revealed in Scripture, as well as its application to concrete life.

#### 7.4 Ecclesiology (*nota verae ecclesiae*)

Obedience is a sign of the true Church of Christ, a *nota verae ecclesiae*. Bonhoeffer understands the

Church as a community of believers where 'Christ is present through the Holy Spirit'.<sup>35</sup> Jesus Christ is present in preaching and in the sacraments, for 'the word of preaching is insufficient to make us members of Christ's Body; the sacraments also have to be added'. True obedience always includes the cross, love, intercessory prayers for believers and non-believers, church discipline, and the expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ. By the cross Bonhoeffer understands the shame, humiliation and ridicule we have to bear from the world 'as a consequence of our binding with Jesus Christ. The cross is not an accidental but a necessary suffering'; it is not a wilfully chosen suffering (*passio activa*) but it is 'honourless suffering' and 'self-denial', connected with suffering and condemnation 'because of Jesus Christ and not of any attitude or a confession'. All Christians who follow Christ must take up their cross.<sup>36</sup> It seems that the cross becomes the principle of Church life in the world.

The obedient visible Church has a deep love towards all people, friends and enemies alike (Mat 5:43-48). To love our enemies means that 'we are to serve our enemy in all things without hypocrisy and with utter sincerity' and that 'we are willing to sacrifice goods, honour and life for our enemies' as for our brothers. Whether the enemy is 'religious, political or personal', Christians 'consider all in love as their Lord had done it'. This love also includes spiritual service to our enemies: 'Bless them that persecute you' because 'their curse can do us no harm'. In intercessory prayer we approach the enemy: 'Through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God.' Praying for them means that 'we are taking their distress and poverty, their guilt and perdition upon ourselves, and pleading to God for them'.<sup>37</sup>

During the era of the atheist Communist regime Jesus' words about loving our enemy taught us to receive them with love as ours neighbours, to pray for them and thus show them Jesus Christ without words. The relationship of love could even overcome our enemy.<sup>38</sup> In 1958 this was also my personal experience. At the age of 15-16 years I began to seek God and to study the Bible. As a result I was expelled from high school three weeks before graduation because I was suspected of hostility towards the state ideology. I could do nothing but pray. After four years of hard work in a steel works and as a coal miner, I requested permission to study theology. The Communist officer

who had not allowed me to finish high school said to me: 'I hurt you several times, but I do not want to repeat it!' I received a recommendation to study theology in 1962.

### 7.5 The state

Relations between Church and state were, are and will always be complicated. From the time of the Enlightenment onwards, European governments are secularised, governed by their own laws. In this context I recall Günther Dehn who wrote: 'The state that focuses solely on political power and knows nothing about its responsibility before God will require either total obedience of the Church or declare it to be dangerous for the state.'<sup>39</sup>

Bonhoeffer's understanding of the state is based on Romans 13 ('Let every person be subject to the governing authorities') and Mark 10:42-45 ('the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many'). He thinks that Paul's words require Christians to accept that the authority of the state comes from God and that 'to resist the power is to resist the ordinance of God'. For this reason Christians should obey, 'wherever they may be and whatever conflict should threaten them', because 'rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil.'<sup>40</sup> This even applies when a Christian has to endure 'punishment and persecution' for 'If he meets with suffering instead of praise, his conscience is clear in the sight of God and he has nothing to fear.' 'He obeys the power not for material profit, but "for conscience's sake"'.<sup>41</sup> In this context Bonhoeffer explicitly writes that 'The starting-point of St Paul's thinking is always the Church, and his sole concern is its well-being and manner of life.' He interprets the apostle's words on the basis of Jesus' words in Mark 10: 'The world exercises dominion, the Christian serves, and thus he shares the earthly lot of his Lord, who became servant.'<sup>42</sup>

In *The Cost of Discipleship* Bonhoeffer explicitly rejects rebellion and resistance against the state<sup>43</sup> and the same voice can be heard in his *Ethics*.<sup>44</sup> Both publications clearly show the pacifist theological-ethical orientation which he later gave up. Bonhoeffer condemns violence, injustice and anti-Semitism. The concept of Christ's dominion over the whole world and creation (Col 1:15-20) is still missing in *The Cost of Discipleship*.

## 8. The structure of responsible life (*Ethics*)

In this part, I will deal with ethical concepts that are related to Christian life in the world and specifically to Bonhoeffer's activity in the conspiracy against Hitler. His *Ethics*, the incomplete work which he began in 1940, has a universal Christological emphasis. Christ is Lord of the Church, of the world and all creation. This universal dominion of Christ points to the doctrine of the mandates. Bonhoeffer distinguishes four mandates, labour, marriage, government and the Church, which he regards as divine 'by virtue of their original and final relation to Christ'.<sup>45</sup> This means that the life of all humans in Church, at work, in marriage and under governments, is ultimately subject to the reign of Christ.

### 8.1 Deputyship (*Stellvertretung*)

Bonhoeffer's concept of deputyship has two aspects: the life of Jesus and human interpersonal relationships. Regarding the first, Bonhoeffer says: 'Jesus as the incarnate Son of God lived in deputyship for us'; 'all His living, His action and His dying was deputyship' for humankind. 'And through Him all human life is in essence a life of deputyship...' Christ's deputyship restored communion between God and humans, and it is in force today in Christ's Church for all who want to meet him as their Saviour.<sup>46</sup>

As to the human aspect, the deputyship relates to human co-existence in family life and in society, for instance: 'The father acts for the children, working for them, caring for them, interceding, fighting and suffering for them.' In civil professions one person helps the other by deputyship in their place.<sup>47</sup>

### 8.2 Responsibility

Bonhoeffer starts with 'Christ who became man, and He thereby bore responsibility and deputyship for men.' This responsibility is inseparable from freedom inasmuch as 'responsibility and freedom are corresponding concepts' and 'responsibility presupposes freedom and freedom can consist only in responsibility'.<sup>48</sup> Our responsibilities concern our relationship to God, the Word of God, to the Church, to the state and to ourselves. Both responsibility and freedom are part of the ethics of following Christ: '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.'<sup>49</sup>

Obedience and responsibility are interlinked, which means that 'obedience is rendered in responsibility'. Both obedience and responsibility also relate to freedom, for 'obedience without freedom is slavery, freedom without obedience is arbitrary self-will'. This connection is confirmed by Jesus Christ 'who stands before God as the one who is both obedient and free. As the obedient one He does His Father's will in blind compliance with the law which is commanded Him, and as the free one He acquiesces in God's will out of His own most personal knowledge, with open eyes and a joyous heart'. And 'a man who acts in the freedom is precisely the man who sees his action finally committed to the guidance of God'.<sup>50</sup>

Larry L. Rasmussen sees in Bonhoeffer's understanding of free responsibility the possibility of a theological-ethical justification for conspiracy; he writes: 'This was the deed of free responsibility, the undertaking of a courageous venture that simultaneously violates the laws of the civil order and conforms to the form of Christ in the world (reality). Here is Bonhoeffer's rationale for conspiracy.'<sup>51</sup>

### 8.3 The acceptance of guilt

According to Bonhoeffer, Christ is not concerned with his own goodness but solely with his love for humanity. For this reason 'He is able to enter into the fellowship of the guilt of men and to take the burden of their guilt upon Himself.' Jesus' sinlessness and his voluntary acceptance of guilt stem from his love for sinful humans. Jesus' freedom from sin and his acceptance of the guilt of others also point to the Christian life as responsible acting for other people.<sup>52</sup> This realisation encourages Bonhoeffer to enter actively into the plot aimed at the violent removal of Hitler. Larry Rasmussen explains that 'essentially it is such an understanding that stands behind Bonhoeffer's move away from the ascetic direction of his earlier pacifism to the new direction of actively sharing in the guilt of his fellowmen and his nation through conspiracy'.<sup>53</sup> But some of his other publications also show that it was not easy for Bonhoeffer to take the decision to be involved in preparations for the assassination of Hitler.<sup>54</sup>

## 9. Faith and trust in God's help in prison

Bonhoeffer's letters from prison were intensively studied, interpreted and discussed in Czechoslovakia in the years 1950-1988. The focus was on his theological emphases such as the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts, his prognosis of the end of religion, and the concepts of *Etsi deus non daretur* (as if there was no God) and *Deus ex machina*. The theology he developed in prison helped the churches behind the Iron Curtain to cope with the atheistic communist ideology.<sup>55</sup>

As far as Bonhoeffer's personal Christian faith and spirituality in prison is concerned, he studied the Holy Scripture intensively, he prayed for his relatives and his fellow prisoners, and he studied theological and philosophical books until his situation in prison became unbearable. He recalls his understanding of Christian obedience toward the state authorities, as demonstrated by a letter to his attorney:

I still cannot believe that this charge has really been made against me. ... If anyone wants to learn something of my conception of the duty of Christian obedience towards the authorities, he should read my exposition of Romans 13 in my book *The Cost of Discipleship*.<sup>56</sup>

Although Bonhoeffer looked for God's presence in prison, he had no doubt that in his further life 'It depends on a God who demands responsible action in a bold venture of faith'. He expected that God would meet him in this situation 'no longer as Thou [You] but also "disguised" in the It', i.e. in the obscurity of current events.<sup>57</sup> Despite the difficulties, he trusted in God's love and forgiveness whatever turn the situation would take.

Bonhoeffer dealt with actual, ethical and social emphases in human relationships in *After Ten Years* (Nach zehn Jahren, 1942-1943).<sup>58</sup> Here we find concepts such as 'evil deeds', 'constant presence of evil', 'problem of distrust' and other symptoms of the crisis in human relationships. These terms indicate the negative influence of the political dictatorship on the interpersonal coexistence in the church and in society. Good, harmonious interpersonal relationships remain a constant struggle even in religious communities.<sup>59</sup> Such constructive, communicative human relations are very relevant in the present situation of the Church in postmodern Europe in order to be able to do mission and social work, and to enable a good international European community.

## 10. Hope for the future

Despite many disappointments in the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer continued to hope that God would guide and help him in the future. His hope is expressed in the following words:

I believe that God can and will bring good out of evil, even out of the greatest evil. For that purpose he needs men who make the best use of everything. I believe that God will give us all the strength we need to help us to resist in all time of distress. But he never gives it in advance, lest we should rely on ourselves and not on him alone. ... I believe that even our mistakes and shortcomings are turned to good account, and that it is no harder for God to deal with them than with our supposedly good deeds. I believe that God is no timeless fate, but that he waits for and answers sincere prayers and responsible actions.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to faith in God's gracious help and guidance for his personal life, Bonhoeffer expressed hope for the renewal of the Christian churches in the future through prayer, through right actions and through relevant, responsible, non-religious proclamation of the Word of God:

All Christian thinking, speaking, and organizing must be born anew out of this prayer and action. ... It is not for us to prophesy the day (though the day will come) when men will once more be called so to utter the word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it. It will be a new language, perhaps quite non-religious, but liberating and redeeming – as was Jesus' language ... it will be the language of a new righteousness and truth, proclaiming God's peace with men and the coming of his kingdom.<sup>61</sup>

Our religious, cultural and political situation is no longer that of Bonhoeffer. Postmodernism is the new reality in which Europe finds itself. Our Europe it is not completely atheistic, secularised and irreligious, but the vast majority of people regard the church as irrelevant. It is a huge challenge for us to give people new confidence in the church.<sup>62</sup> May God help us!

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## Endnotes

- 1 Cf. my 'Master Jan Hus – Obedience or Resistance' in *EJT* 24.1 (2015) 49-56.
- 2 This article is based on a workshop presented at the FEET conference in Orsay near Paris, August 2014.
- 3 For more details see Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologe – Christ – Zeitgenosse* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1967) 35-59. English translation *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A biography* (London: Collins, 1970; revised edition Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).
- 4 Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 80, 95-107. For Harnack see Carl-Jürgen Kaltenborn, *Adolf von Harnack als Lehrer Dietrich Bonhoeffers* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1973).
- 5 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft. Herausgegeben von Eberhard Bethge* (2. Auflage; München und Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch, 1965) 132-137; English: *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (enlarged edition; London: SCM, 1971) 123; see note 54 below.
- 6 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio. Eine dogmatische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der Kirche, Dritte, erweiterte Auflage* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1960).
- 7 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein. Transzendentalphilosophie und Ontologie in der systematischen Theologie*, 3. Auflage (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1964). For Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology in relation to Martin Luther's theology, see Ján Liguš, *CHRISTUS PRAESENS. Ekleziologie Dietricha Bonhoefferi mezi liberalismem a nacionalismem* (Deus et Gentes Vol. 10; Brno: L.Marek, 2008).
- 8 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Seminare – Vorlesungen – Predigten 1924 bis 1941. Gesammelte Schriften* 5. Herausgegeben von Eberhard Bethge (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1972) 181-413 [abbreviated as *GS* 5].
- 9 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Jesus Christus und vom Wesen des Christentums' in *GS* 5, 416-478, 135.
- 10 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Not und Hoffnung in der religiösen Lage der Gegenwart. Gemeindevortrag des Winters in Barcelona 13.11.1928' in *GS* 5, 114, 116-117.
- 11 'Exaudi Predigt 8 Mai 1932 in Dreifaltigkeitskirche, Berlin, Bibeltext: 2.Chron.20,12', in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ökumene: Briefe, Aufsätze, Dokumente 1928 bis 1942. Gesammelte Schriften* 1, Herausgegeben von Eberhard Bethge (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1958) 74 [abbreviated as *GS* 1]; Bonhoeffer, *GS* 5, 117. In other words (117): 'Wir alle, die wir uns noch irgendwie der Kirche verbunden fühlen, die wir uns den Fragen der Sittlichkeit verantwortlich wissen, – wir stecken noch mitten drin in der Not, im Suchen, in der Ratlosigkeit.'
- 12 Bonhoeffer, *GS* 5, 166; also Bonhoeffer, *GS* 1, 142, 41.
- 13 Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 248-249; quoted from the 2000 English edition, 204-205.
- 14 Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung*, 130, 98, 83.
- 15 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Das Wesen der Kirche. Aus Hörernachschriften zusammengestellt und herausgegeben von Otto Dudzus* (München: Chr. Kaiser 1971) 74-76.
- 16 Bonhoeffer, *Wesen der Kirche*, 74.
- 17 Bonhoeffer, *Wesen der Kirche*, 74-75.
- 18 Bonhoeffer, *Wesen der Kirche*, 75-76.
- 19 Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (eds), *A Testament to Freedom. The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990) 561. For the complete contents and Bonhoeffer's arguments against the Aryan Paragraph, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Kirchenkampf und Finkenwalde: Resolutionen, Aufsätze, Rundbriefe 1933 bis 1943. Gesammelte Schriften* 2 Herausgegeben von Eberhard Bethge (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1959) [abbreviated as *GS* 2] 62-69: 'Die Kirche darf die Ordnungen Gottes nicht auflösen oder missachten. Solche Ordnung aber ist die Rasse, darum muss die Kirche rassistisch bestimmt sein.' (63). 'Der Ausschluss der Juden-Christen aus der kirchlichen Gemeinschaft zerstört die Substanz der Kirche Christi ... zweitens richtet die Kirche ... ein Gesetz auf, das erfüllt sein muss bevor man zur kirchlichen Gemeinschaft gehören darf, nämlich das Rassengesetz.' Also Bonhoeffer, *GS* 1, 140-158.
- 20 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Auslegungen – Predigten 1933 bis 1944. Gesammelte Schriften* 4. Herausgegeben von Eberhard Bethge (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1961) 130-136 [abbreviated as *GS* 4].
- 21 Bonhoeffer, *GS* 1, 39-40, 278, 194, 192-193; for details see also Bonhoeffer, *GS* 2, 159, 186, 194, 155. Bonhoeffer's London Sermons in Forest Hill are in Bonhoeffer, *GS* 4, 154-182.
- 22 Bonhoeffer, *GS* 2, 102.
- 23 *A Testament to Freedom. The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson*, 561-562.
- 24 See the letters in Bonhoeffer, *GS* 2, 131-132, 283-284.
- 25 Bonhoeffer, *GS* 4, 399, 390, and Bonhoeffer, *GS* 1, 233.
- 26 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Theologie – Gemeinde: Vorlesungen, Briefe, Gespräche 1927 bis 1944. Gesammelte Schriften* 3, Herausgegeben von Eberhard Bethge (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1960) 233-234.
- 27 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1937), English *The Cost of Discipleship* (complete edition; London: SCM, 1959) 111.
- 28 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 213-214.
- 29 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 111.
- 30 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 203, 205.
- 31 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 54.

- 32 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 35-47.
- 33 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 35.
- 34 More details in Liguš, *CHRISTUS PRAESENS*, 89-98.
- 35 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 219.
- 36 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 219, also 80, 207, 110, 217-219.
- 37 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 133-134.
- 38 For the impact of Bonhoeffer's theology on the fall of the Iron Curtain, see Ján Liguš, 'Vlivy Bonhoefferovy teologie na rozpad Železné opony' [The Influence of Bonhoeffer's Theology on the Disintegration of the Iron Curtain] in *Víra a teologie Dietricha Bonhoeffera* (Second edition; Bratislava: Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Mateja Bela, Katedra evanjelikálnej teológie Banská Bystrica, vydal ECM s.r.o. 1996) 102-106.
- 39 Günther Dehn, *Kirche und Völkerversöhnung. Dokumente zum Halleschen Universitätskonflikt* (Berlin: Furche, 1931), quoted in Christoph Strohm, *Theologische Ethik im Kampf gegen den Nationalsozialismus. Der Weg Dietrich Bonhoeffers mit den Juristen Hans von Dohnanyi und Gerhard Leibholz in den Widerstand* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1989) 81.
- 40 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 235-236.
- 41 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 237.
- 42 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 236, 235.
- 43 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 23.
- 44 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Edited by Eberhard Bethge (Fifth impression; London: SCM, 1985) 315; compare Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 23.
- 45 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 179.
- 46 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 179, 195. On deputyship in Bonhoeffer see Noemi Bravená, *Ježíš Kristus, bratr a bližní jednáji na m,ém míst. Zástupnost v teologii Dietricha Bonhoeffera [Jesus Christ, brother and neighbour act in my place. Deputyship in the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer]* Pontes Pragensis Vol. 56 (Brno: L. Marek, Centre for religious and cultural dialogue at the Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague, 2010).
- 47 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 194.
- 48 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 217.
- 49 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 196, 217.
- 50 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 220, 218.
- 51 Larry L. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Reality and Resistance* (Studies in Christian Ethics series; (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972) 45.
- 52 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 209-210.
- 53 Rasmussen, *Bonhoeffer*, 51.
- 54 Gotthard Fuchs, *Glaube als Widerstandskraft: Edith Stein, Alfred Delp, Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht, 1986); Strohm, *Theologische Ethik*. Compare the outlines of the letter to Dr. Roeder in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (enlarged edition, sixth impression; London: SCM, 1986) 60 [cf. note 5 above].
- 55 For details see Jan Mili Lochman, *Church in A Marxist Society. A Czechoslovak view* (New York-Evanston and London: Harper and Row, 1970).
- 56 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 60.
- 57 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 6, 217.
- 58 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 3-17.
- 59 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 16, 4-5, 16-17.
- 60 Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 11.
- 61 Bonhoeffer, 'Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of Dietrich Wilhelm Ruediger Bethge, May 1944' in Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 300.
- 62 See the dissertation of my student Petr Živný, *Theoretical, Practical and Research Aspects of Homiletic Communication. Catholic and Protestant Approach*. Dissertation Charles University Prague – Hussite Theological Faculty (2013) 130.