

# ディートリッヒ・ボンヘッファーの弟子化と召命に対する見解

## Dietrich Bonhoeffer's View of Discipleship and Vocation

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German theologian, pastor, scholar, and political activist caught up in the whirlwind of world events between World War I and World War II. His death in the Flossenbürg concentration camp on April 9, 1945 has been described as one of Christian martyrdom.<sup>1</sup> Twenty-one years later, Adolf Hitler committed suicide.

In recent decades Bonhoeffer's writings and life have become well known and studied. Bonhoeffer scholar John De Gruchy "suggested that there are three major themes...which continue to attract attention. These may be broadly stated as, firstly, discipleship and community, then involvement in the struggle for justice and peace, finally faith in a secular age."<sup>2</sup> In this research, I will concentrate on the first of these major themes, that of discipleship and vocation.

Bonhoeffer's concepts of discipleship and vocation, developed in the midst of great turmoil, in a time not too distant from our own, offer significant insights to people who are seeking to live faithfully in an uncertain age. His theological thought, practical work as a pastor and activist, and personal spirituality provide useful insights for a contemporary understanding of Christian vocation.

Bonhoeffer's struggle to understand discipleship, or the call to follow Jesus, informed much of his life and his work. In this book, *Discipleship*, he asked the question, "what could the call to follow Jesus mean today for the worker, the businessman, the farmer or the soldier?"<sup>3</sup> In his book, *Ethics*, he asked two related questions, "What is the will of God?" and "With what reality will we reckon in our life?"<sup>4</sup> The same kind of questions are asked today by many different people. I believe that Bonhoeffer's reflection on these questions provide important and useful insights for my discussion of vocation as faithfully living and educating today.

Bonhoeffer's view of Christian vocation was based primarily in his understanding of discipleship as the call of Christ and responsible action in response. Bonhoeffer believed that it was only by the call of grace that a person was justified. From Christ's perspective this new life as a disciple was a person's vocation. From the individual's perspective this new life was one of responsibility. It was a life of responsibility lived out wholly and completely in response to the call of Christ. There was no artificial dividing line between faith and life, rather living out one's vocation meant careful reflection on all one's responsibilities and relationships, including family and work.<sup>5</sup>

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1 John W. De Gruchy, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ*, (London: Collins, 1988), 1.

2 John W. De Gruchy, "The Reception of Bonhoeffer's theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. De Gruchy (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 103.

3 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works vol.4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 24.

4 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works vol.6 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 47, 49.

5 Ibid., 296-297.

Using the call to follow Jesus as his foundation, Bonhoeffer argued that discipleship was made up of three major inter-relationship: the relationship between grace, faith, and discipleship; between discipleship and the church; and between discipleship and the world.<sup>6</sup> By understanding the core theme of discipleship in Bonhoeffer's thought, we can understand more clearly his view of vocation. One way to explore his view of discipleship is to discuss these three relationships. In the discussion of the third relationship, that of the disciple and the world becomes clear in his discussion of responsible action.

### **Discipleship: The Basis of Vocation in Bonhoeffer's Thought**

Living as a disciple, or followers of Jesus Christ, was the life of vocation for Bonhoeffer. How one followed Christ was a question that Bonhoeffer reflected on throughout his life. In this section, we look at the relationships among grace, faith, and discipleship in Bonhoeffer's thought and some characteristic of the life of the disciple.

#### **The Relationship of Grace, Faith, and Discipleship**

In his book, *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer clearly laid out how he understands the relationship among grace, faith, and discipleship. Completed in 1937 shortly before the illegal seminary he was directing was shut down by the Gestapo, the text is filled with subtle references to the political and religious upheaval in Germany during the early and mid 1930s.<sup>7</sup> It contained material from his series of lectures on the topic to the students at the seminary in Finkenwalde.<sup>8</sup> In addition, it reflected his longstanding interest in, and study of, the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>9</sup> He began the book by comparing cheap grace and costly grace.

#### **Cheap Grace and Costly Grace**

Cheap grace, according to Bonhoeffer, demanded nothing from the person, not repentance or remorse, it was "justification of sin, but not the sinner."<sup>10</sup> Bonhoeffer believed that:

Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism Without the discipline of a community; it is the Lord's Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap Grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the Living, incarnate Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, Bonhoeffer argued that costly called a person to discipleship (costly) and to relationship with Jesus Christ (grace). It is called a person to a death of self (costly) but a life in Christ (grace).

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<sup>6</sup> The three major inter-relationship are based on John Godsey's discussion of *The Cost of Discipleship* (the forerunner to the recent, authoritative English translation of Bonhoeffer's work). He argues that the first part is a discussion of the relation between discipleship and the church. I have added the third inter-relationship which reflects some of Bonhoeffer's later work. See John Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's later work*. See John Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 151.

<sup>7</sup> Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 419-451.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 450-451.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 450-460.

<sup>10</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 43.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

Costly grace meant that God gave the life of God's Son (costly) for sinners (grace). Costly grace was a gracious call to follow Jesus into new life.<sup>12</sup>

Bonhoeffer argued that costly grace was lost in the early church when the world was Christianized and the Christian faith became more widely accepted. No longer did people understand the links between grace, faith, and discipleship. It was only in monasticism that the relation of grace, faith, and discipleship. But that, too, became corrupted in the two tiered system of Luther's time.<sup>13</sup>

Luther, according to Bonhoeffer, was called by God out of the monastery, into the world to challenge the two tiered system.<sup>14</sup> Luther condemned special vocation of the monastics and called all Christians to follow their vocation in the world. This was a difficult, costly task but one that encouraged the Christian to look to Jesus Christ for forgiveness daily (grace)

Following Christ in one's daily tasks, and looking to him for direction, comfort, and forgiveness did not allow a person to live by cheap grace. Bonhoeffer argued that Lutherans, by emphasizing "grace alone" had cheapened grace, and destroyed the relationship between grace and discipleship that Luther had intended.<sup>15</sup> Cheap grace had, in advance, forgiven all sins and thereby hardened people into disobedience, because "the world is in principle justified by grace."<sup>16</sup> Cheap grace demanded nothing from people, because it was by grace alone that one is saved. People could continue to live as if they had not been called out of their old way of life into a new life of discipleship. Bonhoeffer boldly commented that "those who want to use this grace to exuse themselves from discipleship are deceiving themselves."<sup>17</sup> It provided an easy way out of taking responsibility for one's actions or inactions. By not teaching the connection between faith and life, between personal commitment and action, the church had allowed sin to flourish in many forms.

According to Bonhoeffer, a church that preached cheap grace was no longer following Christ and forced individuals to develop their own understanding of the relationship between grace and discipleship.<sup>18</sup> Those "for whom following Jesus Christ means nothing other than living from grace and for whom grace means following Christ" were blessed and could live in the world without being drawn into the world.<sup>19</sup>

As such, Bonhoeffer believed that the correct relationship between grace and discipleship was a costly one, for God and for the person. It demanded a great deal from the individual and it was possible only when a person understand Bonhoeffer's concept of faith.

### **Faith: Call, Response, Context, and Obedience**

According to Bonhoeffer, faith was possible when a situation included four elements: call, response, context, and obedience.<sup>20</sup> The first element was the call of Jesus Christ. The call was the center and the focus of the event. It was not based in he initiative of the individual. Bonhoeffer believed that "no

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>19</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 55, 56.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 63.

one can call themselves.”<sup>21</sup> Neither, he insisted, could not anything come between Jesus and the call to follow, including family, personal history, or the law as shown in the narrative about the three disciples in Luke 9.<sup>22</sup>

With his second element, Bonhoeffer argued that there was no human effort involved in the faith situation. The “road to faith passes through obedience to Christ’s call.”<sup>23</sup> It was not piety or a belief about Christ but an act of obedience that opened the door to faith and trust in Christ. The disciples stepped through that door, into a new world and a new situation, in obedience to Christ’s call. They experienced a break with all they had known before and committed solely to Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup>

It was not, wrote Bonhoeffer, a call to make a confession of faith or to follow a teacher and mentor. It was not a personal program of self-improvement or a personal goal or idea. It was a “commitment solely to the person of Jesus Christ, a breaking through of all legalisms by the grace of him who calls.”<sup>25</sup> Further, “Christianity without the living Jesus Christ, remain necessarily a Christianity without discipleship; and a Christianity without discipleship is always a Christianity without Jesus Christ.”<sup>26</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s third element recognized that the situation itself was not important. It was the call of Jesus Christ that was the focus. The call of the disciples came to them at their place of work, and later, people came to hear and follow Jesus as he preached in the outdoors and synagogues, and healed in cities and towns. The gospel didn’t describe the call of Jesus as coming to people in quiet meditation or reflection, or in sacred places as we know them today. Rather, the call to follow came in the midst of the everyday life of the disciples.

Finally, Bonhoeffer argued that “the situation which enables faith can itself happen only in faith.”<sup>27</sup> This paradoxical statement affirms another well known quote of Bonhoeffer, “Only the believe obey and only the obedient believe.”<sup>28</sup> He strongly disagreed with any idea that obedience followed faith chronologically. However, obedience was important so that faith did not become “pious self-deception” or a form of cheap grace.<sup>29</sup>

Bonhoeffer believe that there was an “indissoluble unity between faith and obedience.”<sup>30</sup> There could not be one without the other. However, comments scholar John Godsey, for the sake of justification the two must be understood separately.<sup>31</sup> Bonhoeffer described the first step as an external act, “which exchanges one mode of existence for another.”<sup>32</sup> This was something anyone could do, in human freedom, as Peter left his nets to follow, Levi left his booth, and people come to church. It was not to be understood in any way as an act of merit that could contribute to one’s salvation. It was a “dead work of the law”.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>25</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 59.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> John Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 154.

<sup>32</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 64.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 65.

When first step was taken solely in response to Jesus' word of command and with the focus on the one who calls, any internal or personal motivation was set aside. Bonhoeffer insisted that discipleship was simple obedience to the authority of Jesus Christ, the incarnate one. Obeying the specific and actual call of Christ in simple obedience was necessary to avoid cheap grace.

### **Discipleship: Some Characteristics for Living the Life of Vocation.**

Bonhoeffer was unflinching in his challenge to the Christian and the church to live the life of discipleship. He recognized that the life of obedience in response to the call of Christ was not an easy one. He knew that suffering and joy was a part of the life of the disciple and not something to be avoided or denied. As he studied the Sermon on the Mount, he also articulated was both extraordinary and hidden about the life of the disciple as they followed Christ in simple obedience. Prayer and other spiritual disciplines played an important role in his life as he lived out his vocation as a disciple of Christ. I believe these three sets of characteristics of the life of discipleship summarize key theme in Bonhoeffer's view of vocation. They also provide important insights and connections for a contemporary understanding of vocation as faithful living and educating in an uncertain age.

### **Suffering and Joy**

Bonhoeffer connected discipleship with suffering and the cross of Christ in his exegesis of Mark: 31-38. He wrote, "Just as Christ is only Christ as one who suffers and is rejected, so a disciple is a disciple only in suffering and being rejected, thereby participating in crucifixion,"<sup>34</sup> It was necessary for Jesus to suffer and to be rejected in the divine plan; to believe otherwise was satanic, according to Bonhoeffer. The church had always had problems with this aspect of Jesus' incarnation, and that in itself was evidence of Satan at work, pulling the church away from the cross of Christ.<sup>35</sup>

Bonhoeffer interpreted the verse, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves" (Mark 8: 34), to mean a complete focus on Jesus Christ and knowing only him. It was not ascetic exercises or self martyrdom. It was complete involvement with, reflection on, and awareness of Jesus Christ in one's life.<sup>36</sup>

Bonhoeffer believed that the cross of the disciple becomes bearable when the locus was Jesus Christ. The cross was necessary suffering, and it came not from natural existence, but as a result of being Christian. It was both suffering and the rejection that came along with one's allegiance to Jesus Christ. Here Bonhoeffer distinguished between natural or ordinary existence and Christian existence. Christian existence meant more than the ordinary stresses and strains of everyday. Being shunned, despised, and deserted by people was part and parcel of Christian life, as the psalms was declared. This was, in Bonhoeffer's words, "Christ-suffering." It was suffering and rejection that was accorded to each person by God, in differing amounts.<sup>37</sup>

The first form of Christ-suffering was the separation from the familiar and natural world of one's existence before the call of discipleship. It was death of self and a new beginning of life in Christ. In familiar Lutheran language, Bonhoeffer saw discipleship as a daily struggle with sin and Satan.<sup>38</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 88.

struggle and the suffering inflicted wounds that showed the connections between the disciple, the rest of the community of the cross, and Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup>

A second form of Christ-suffering was bearing the burden of sin for others. In addition to the suffering the individual disciple may experience in their own existential struggle, the disciple also became a burden bearer for others (Gal.6: 2). To be a burden bearer meant a deep sense of the other's sin. It looked beyond a person's attitude or personality or behavior to the sinful core of the person. Bonhoeffer recognized that it was only through the cross of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of Christ that a person could bear this burden. Forgiving the sin of the other was another form of Christ suffering.<sup>40</sup>

Suffering was the mark of both the disciple and the church. It was costly grace and one that was not very popular or easy. Bonhoeffer believed that it was also joyful because it meant being tied to Jesus Christ and the community of the cross. In the cross, Christ overcame suffering and eventually, the disciples would overcome as well.<sup>41</sup>

### Extraordinariness and Hiddenness

Based in his reflection upon Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7), Bonhoeffer argued that the extraordinariness of discipleship meant going beyond the usual, the expected, the natural way of things.<sup>42</sup> For Bonhoeffer, the extraordinary was the deeds that were done in simple obedience to the will of Jesus.

Additionally, Bonhoeffer issued a warning about either withdrawing from the world in order to follow the extraordinary path of discipleship or attempting to build a heavenly kingdom on earth.<sup>43</sup> Instead, discipleship was about genuine obedience and genuine humility.<sup>44</sup> Taken together, extraordinariness and hiddenness illustrated the tensions of discipleship lived in daily life and in obedience to Christ.

Bonhoeffer used the Beatitudes (Matt.5: 1-11) to describe some of the specifics of the extraordinariness of the life of discipleship. He wrote that the "blessed" of the beatitudes had nothing to do with want or renunciation.<sup>45</sup> Instead, the use of the word "blessed" recognized "the call and the promise, for whose sake those following him live in want and renunciation."<sup>46</sup>

In his interpretation of the Beatitudes, Bonhoeffer challenged the Christians and the church of his day to examine their lives. To be "poor in spirit" meant giving up all earthy and spiritual forms of security. The focus was totally on Christ. To "mourn" meant bearing the suffering of others (including the Jews and others who were oppressed by the Nazis), not just mourning for one's self or family. To be "meek" meant giving up all claims to any personal rights or power and to bear the injustice and violence of the world. In the church community was hope, hope in the return of Christ, and hope in the gospel.

Those who were "persecuted for righteousness sake" were those who "suffer for a righteous

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 144-145.

<sup>43</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 150.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

cause.”<sup>47</sup> Later, in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer expanded his view on this beatitude; a person could be persecuted for a just cause - a cause that was true, good, and humane.<sup>48</sup>

He argued against those who believed that they could avoid all suffering by claiming that they would suffer only for their “explicit confession of faith in Christ” were missing the point of their Christian existence.<sup>49</sup> He believed that there was a connection between the suffering of the world and the response of good and just people to the suffering, and the suffering of Christ. He described people who in the midst of their suffering came to call on Jesus Christ and made the eternal connection with their Savior.<sup>50</sup>

The hiddenness of discipleship, Bonhoeffer argued, was an antidote to the human temptation to show off one’s piety publicly or legalistically. Expressing one’s faith quietly and without fanfare in everyday circumstances helped to eliminate the desire to be better than someone else or to try to earn one’s salvation. Obedient deeds were done not to be noticed or done out of one’s own will or desire but only in obedience to the word of Jesus. In this way, the deeds were invisible even to the disciples themselves. They were hidden in the person’s whole hearted commitment to Christ.

### Prayer and Other Spiritual Disciplines

Scholar William Gould notes that for Bonhoeffer, prayer was the supreme example of the hiddenness of the Christian life.<sup>51</sup> Gould describes the major themes of Bonhoeffer on prayer: a.) The disciple was to pray to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in faith, b) God and God alone was the object of a person’s prayer, c.) Prayer was both specific and concrete, not lost in a general adoration of God.<sup>52</sup> Bonhoeffer himself was committed to a life of self-control and discipline for the Christian. Those discipline might include fasting, prayer, meditation, and time apart. But, he cautioned they were to be used to help the disciple focus on Christ and become more joyful in service. They were not to be done legalistically, moralistically, in imitation of Christ, or perhaps seeking a higher way. Nothing should come between the disciple and Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s personal commitment to prayer and other spiritual disciplines was evident throughout his life. He designed the life of the seminary he directed to include time of worship, prayer, personal meditation, confession, service, and work.<sup>54</sup> His own example and leadership in these areas eventually won over the students, some of who were reluctant to participate.<sup>55</sup> Later, after he was imprisoned, he continued his writing, reading, prayer, and pastoral ministry.<sup>56</sup> He scheduled morning prayer and meditation on the Scriptures as a part of his daily routine and wrote very personally of his reflections.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>48</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 346.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>51</sup> William Gould, *The Wordly Christians: Bonhoeffer on Discipleship*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 44.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 158-161.

<sup>54</sup> Bonhoeffer describes the daily routine he created for the seminary in his famous text, *Life together*.

<sup>55</sup> Geffery B. Kelly, *The Cost of Moral Leadership: The Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 2003, 254.

<sup>56</sup> Bethge, 850, 852-853.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 831.

He used the church calendar to help guide his days and his meditations.<sup>58</sup>

Scholar Geffery Kelly argues that Bonhoeffer's consistent use of study, meditation, and prayer were the well springs of his internal fortitudes as he lived his life in uncertain and turbulent times.<sup>59</sup> His spirituality was Christocentric and lived out through prayer and action for justice.<sup>60</sup> His mediation on the Scriptures gave him the insight that the combination of prayer with action helped the Christian to resist great evil, suffering, and violence. It "kept Bonhoeffer's action from degenerating into self-righteousness, that infused his spirits with dogged perseverance" and kept his actions for justice tempered by the gospel of Christ.<sup>61</sup>

Bonhoeffer's understanding of the demands and the joys of discipleship, in relationship to Christ, presented an argument that challenged both the Christian and the church of the day to examine their understanding of what it meant to be a Christian and a disciple of Christ. Using the Sermon on the Mount, he argued against an easy, bourgeois acceptance of cheap grace and a simple, unthinking response to the actions of the Nazi state.

He provided a biblical view of suffering and juxtaposed it against the joy of community with fellow believers and the hope of the world to come.<sup>62</sup> By doing so, he gave his readers a way to understand their own suffering in relationship to Christ and the world to come.

He discussed how the simplest action, done in obedience to Christ, becomes extraordinary in relation to the rest of the world. The same action, coming from a deep commitment to Christ, taken on new meaning-hidden from the rest of the world, and may be even the disciple himself - but it had eternal meaning as an expression of the disciple's commitment to Christ.<sup>63</sup>

With so much of the world around the disciple in disarray, Bonhoeffer focused the attention of the disciple on Christ and the way to live as a responsible disciple, including the use of prayer and other spiritual disciplines.<sup>64</sup> Prayer, study, and meditation helped to keep the disciple in relationship with Christ and informed the actions of the disciple. Bonhoeffer fully understood the organic relationship between Christ and the disciple. He understood the many ways in which that relationship could be harmed and misdirected, including the way in which the disciple related to the church. In the next section, I discuss the inter-relationship of the disciple and the church.

### **The Relationship between Discipleship and the Church**

For Bonhoeffer, the second inter-relationship that influenced the life of the disciple was the relationship between the disciple and the church. Bonhoeffer believed that immediate direct, and personal call to discipleship of the gospels changed after Christ's resurrection and ascension. He compared Pauline texts with the Synoptic Gospels and argued that discipleship, after Jesus ascended into heaven, was centered in the church. No longer did the call to follow come directly from Christ himself as described in the Gospels, instead the call to discipleship was embodied in the preaching of the Word and Baptism

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<sup>58</sup> Larry Rasumussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: His Significance for North Americans*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 58.

<sup>59</sup> Kelly, "Prayer and Action for Justice: Bonhoeffer's Spirituality" in *The Cambridge Companion*, 246.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 251-252.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>62</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 110.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-150.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.



in the church community.

### Baptism

Bonhoeffer, following classic Lutheran theology, believed that by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ encountered the person in Baptism through the word of God. In Baptism, the person was claimed by Jesus as his own. Just as with the gospel descriptions of the calls of the disciples, Bonhoeffer taught that Baptism was both a gift from God, and a break from one's old life and world. Through Baptism, a person was no longer dominated by sin but had a new life in Christ. A person died to the old life and was born into a new community of disciples united with Christ.

The role of the Holy Spirit, according to Bonhoeffer, was critical in understanding the importance of Baptism in the life of the contemporary disciple. Baptism was not solely a ceremony or ritual, rather it was the reception of Christ himself in the life and heart of the disciple through Holy Spirit.<sup>65</sup> The work of the Holy Spirit kept the disciple in the community of believers and maintained the community of believers. Only through the Holy Spirit could one know the nature and the will of Jesus, and learn and follow his teachings.

### Church as the Body of Christ

The nature of the church as the embodiment of Christ informed Bonhoeffer's view of the disciple who was living in the latter days. While the first disciples lived in close proximity to Christ and saw him in physical form, contemporary disciples live in the glorified presence of Christ in the community of believers.<sup>66</sup>

Bonhoeffer argued that it was necessary that God send his Son, Jesus Christ, to take on human nature, in order to bring salvation to all humanity. He saw Christ as the vicarious representative who took on the sinful nature of all of humanity, before God, living and dying, and bearing the sin of the world. As such, "the body of Jesus Christ in which we together with all of humanity are accepted by God, has now become the foundation of our salvation."<sup>67</sup> Through one's Baptism, a person died and rose with Christ. It was both a new body and a new humanity that had come through death, into life.

The new person joined the new humanity (the church) through Baptism.<sup>68</sup> The new person was a follower of Jesus, a disciple who was connected to Christ through both Baptism and the church community - the body of Christ. Bonhoeffer noted that in the gospel of John the crucified body of Christ was pierced in the side, and water and blood poured out.<sup>69</sup> He connected these two elements (water and blood) with the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion as Paul did in Ephesians 3: 6.<sup>70</sup>

Bonhoeffer believed that the members of the body of Christ were many and diverse, but they were united in the one body. It was this unity that gave meaning and identity to each member. The relationship between the individual disciple and the church as the embodiment of Christ was organic and constantly evolving, individual disciple became members of the body of Christ, from the body of Christ received nurture, encouragement, and correction. Bonhoeffer argued that Jesus Christ, by the

<sup>65</sup> 2 Corinthians 3: 17.

<sup>66</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 213.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>68</sup> Gould, 35.

<sup>69</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 216.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

power of the Holy Spirit, worked in , and through the church, to reach the disciple and the world with the gospel.<sup>71</sup>

### Visible Church Community

Using Acts 2:42-47 as his basic text, Bonhoeffer discussed the space that the church takes up in the world. What does this space look like and what makes up the space ? He vehemently affirmed that “the incarnate Son of God needs not only ears or even hearts; he needs actual, living human beings who follow him.”<sup>72</sup> He contrasted the physical presence of the church with the idea that a truth, a doctrine or a religion does not need a space of its own.<sup>73</sup>

First, Bonhoeffer argued, the church was visible in the preaching of the Word, according to the Acts text, and this was the teaching of “the physical event of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.”<sup>74</sup> Bonhoeffer believed the word that the apostle were preaching and teaching was “truly God’s Word in human words (1 Thessalonians 2: 13).”<sup>75</sup> As such, God’s Word sought community from the very beginning. Through the Holy Communion belong solely to the community of the Body of Christ.”<sup>76</sup> As such they were a witness to both the community and the world of Christ’s existence in the world and the lives of the disciples.

Finally, the church claimed space, according to Bonhoeffer, for its worship, order, and the daily life of its members. The community of the first disciples was fully engaged in the following of Christ. It was all encompassing and a living witness. For Bonhoeffer the disciple belonged to Christ, body and soul, and this was to be shown every day in the life of the disciple.<sup>77</sup> In this early church, believers supported each other, by providing for spiritual and bodily needs. Indeed, they had a responsibility to do so as equal members of the body of Christ.<sup>78</sup> The relationship among members of the body of Christ was itself another visible witness to the world about the love of Christ and his call to follow.

Not only was the relationship among the members of the body of Christ a witness to the world but the “community of disciples” was given the Great Commission by Christ himself. The gift of salvation and the proclamation of the gift was transferred to the church after his death and resurrection. So, the disciples who made up the church, were “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 6: 13) with the responsibility to preserve, flavor, and cleanse the world as followers of Christ.<sup>79</sup> They were also to be “light to the world” (Matt.6: 14) and show the world what it meant to be disciples in their own individual lives and in the community of disciples- the body of Christ.<sup>80</sup> Bonhoeffer emphasized that this was something the disciples were because of their call - it was not something they would become, as the Reformers believed, but rather who they became at the call of Christ to follow.<sup>81</sup> It was an immediate change, an immediate break from who they once were to what Christ had called them to be - followers and disciples.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 217-224.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 244, 248.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

### The Relationship between Discipleship and the world

The third inter-relationship of Bonhoeffer's view of the life of the disciple, as the relationship of discipleship and the world, incorporates the Christcentric, personal, and interactive dimensions of the first two relationships. Bonhoeffer believed that the church, which came into being after Christ ascended into heaven, was the living embodiment of Christ in the world. The disciple, as a member of the church through Baptism, was also active in the world. The question for Bonhoeffer was how the disciple and the church could be active in the world as followers of Christ.

Bonhoeffer came to believe strongly that the role of the disciple in the world was to be actively engaged in suffering for others and resisting evil. He constantly challenged Christians of his time on their discipleship as the political situation in Germany continued to evolve.<sup>82</sup> Bonhoeffer argued more and more pointedly over time that caring for the persecuted, the oppressed, and working for "justice, truth, humanity, and freedom" was truly Christian.<sup>83</sup> How the disciple could do this in their daily lives was a challenge but it was one, Bonhoeffer believed, that was critical as an expression of one's active and responsible discipleship.<sup>84</sup>

In Bonhoeffer's thought, the church as the living embodiment of Christ meant both engagement with and a witness to the world. Bonhoeffer argued that the church both claimed Christ and acted in community with Christ toward the world. Just as Christ came not to be served but to serve others, so the church did not serve itself but it served and suffered for others.<sup>85</sup> The church-community, understood in this manner, did not exist for itself but existed to serve, act, and speak for others in their pain and oppression. The church, he wrote, "is there for the world's sake."<sup>86</sup>

Bonhoeffer argued that the relationship between discipleship and the world, as active and lived out in the world, including political and social activism on behalf of the suffering and the oppressed, was always based in a personal and intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>87</sup> In living out his relationship with Christ, Bonhoeffer became more and more involved in the political and social events of wartime Germany. Eventually, his commitment to live as an active disciple of Christ led to his participation in, and knowledge of, several plots to assassinate Hitler.<sup>88</sup>

### Historical Context

Following the publication of *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer's life became more complicated. The seminary continued in exile in Pomerania and Bonhoeffer shuttled between two vicarages where the students lived and worked as apprentice vicars in local parishes.<sup>89</sup> Eventually, by March 1940, all the seminary students were drafted into military service.

In June 1939 he left Germany for America at the invitation of Reinhold Niebuhr to being a lecture tour. But within a month he had changed his mind and returned to Germany in July of 1939. He

<sup>82</sup> Bethge, 681-797.

<sup>83</sup> Bonhoeffer, "Christ, Reality, and Good," in *Ethics*, 60-62.

<sup>84</sup> Bonhoeffer continued to explore the idea of the suffering disciple during his time in prison. For example, see the letter of July and August, 1944 Kelly and Nelson, *Testament*, 508-513.

<sup>85</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 404-408.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 404.

<sup>87</sup> See, Geffery B. Kelly, *Liberating Faith: Bonhoeffer's Message for Today*, with an introduction by Eberhard Bethge (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 66-78.

<sup>88</sup> Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 681-797.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 589.

believed that it was important that he stay with his fellow Christians in Germany so that he could participate in the reconstruction of the church and state after the war. In 1939 he also became a civilian member of the *Abwehr* (the counter intelligence agency of the armed forces of Nazi Germany). He was saved from being drafted into the military by his contacts in the *Abwehr*, who argued that he could serve more effectively in counterintelligence.<sup>90</sup> In 1940, Bonhoeffer became involved in an important resistance movement within the hierarchy of the Nazi state that was involved in several plots to assassinate Hitler. His ecumenical contacts became a conduit for information about Nazi plans to the West. He was also able to assist in smuggling a small number of Jews out of Germany.<sup>91</sup>

Bonhoeffer's official pastoral work was rapidly coming to an end during these years. Since 1938, the Nazi state had forbidden him from living in Berlin (where his parents lived) or teaching. In 1940, he was stopped from public speaking or preaching.<sup>92</sup> His supervision of seminarians was done quietly and clandestinely until the program was closed down entirely.

It was against the backdrop of these events that Bonhoeffer continued to write, study, and reflect theologically on what it meant to be a Christian and the church in troubled times. As a theologian and pastor, he watched with horror the atrocities of the Nazi state, and the accommodations made by the state church and "good" Christians to the regime.<sup>93</sup> His text on ethics, written in pieces from 1940-1943, reflects his theological thoughts and response to the various events of his life, his church, and his country.<sup>94</sup> He also wrote a number of letters to family, friends, and students who were engaged in various activities during the war as he sought to encourage, question, and push for action.<sup>95</sup> His letter writing and theological reflections continued after he was captured and imprisoned by the Gestapo in April of 1943 when he was implicated in a plot to kill Hitler.<sup>96</sup> He remained imprisoned until his death in 1945.

As a result of his experiences, study, and reflection Bonhoeffer re-envisioned the relationship between the disciple, the church, and the world from his earlier work. In the next section, I briefly discuss four selected themes from Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*. These four themes: a.) the Lordship of Christ, b.) responsible action in the light of freedom in Christ, provide additional insights on Bonhoeffer's understanding of vocation as faithful living in an uncertain age.

### **Lordship of Christ.**

The concept of the Lord of Christ in the matter of church and world in Bonhoeffer's thought was an extension of Luther's thinking about the two kingdoms. Bonhoeffer emphasized the essential unity of Christ presence in both the church and the world through Christ's embodiment in the church.<sup>97</sup> This did not give the church precedent or even power over the world/state but rather it became a haven for those who had been persecuted for a just cause.<sup>98</sup> For Bonhoeffer, this showed the power of Jesus Christ over all of life. Even in the midst of the horrors of the Nazi regime, people were coming together

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 691.

<sup>91</sup> Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 648.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 698.

<sup>93</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 78-80.

<sup>94</sup> See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 715-722.

<sup>95</sup> See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 702-705.

<sup>96</sup> Kuhnns, 126.

<sup>97</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 341-346.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 345.

in the Christ-community in opposition to evil.<sup>99</sup>

The suffering and persecuted church-community welcomed those who themselves were persecuted and suffering for justice, truth, humanity, and freedom.<sup>100</sup> Bonhoeffer wrote that in times of “lawlessness and wickedness” the gospel will show itself in the lives of people “who are just, truthful, and humane.”<sup>101</sup> As such, these people may not know it but they were doing Christ work, and Christ cared for them.<sup>102</sup> He believed that in difficult times people who struggled against evil, suffered for truth and justice, find and know Christ, and can be welcomed into the church-community.<sup>103</sup>

The theme of the lordship of Christ challenged the Christian, the church, and the world to acknowledge the “.....*correct starting point*.”<sup>104</sup> Bonhoeffer boldly proclaimed that:

Its is in Jesus Christ that God’s relationship to the world is determined. We do not know any other relationship of God to the world apart from Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church, too, has no relationship to the world other than through Jesus Christ. This means that the proper relationship of the church to the world does not derive from some natural law, or law of universal human rights, but solely from the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>105</sup>

The church proclaimed a word of redemption for all people and that message demanded action. Bonhoeffer believed that the proclamation itself meant that the church had a responsibility for the world in both word and deed, to witness to the world, to work for justice, and to make room in the world for the gospel.<sup>106</sup> There was no double morality, one for the world and one for the church. Law and gospel must be proclaimed to both the church and the world. The church did not proclaim any “concrete earthly order that would necessarily follow from faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>107</sup> Rather, it could and must oppose any real and actual order that was no offense to faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>108</sup> Bonhoeffer emphasized that all forms of order needed to be evaluated constantly against the will of God who had reconciled the world through Jesus Christ.<sup>109</sup>

### **Conformation and Christ**

Building on some of his initial thinking in Discipleship, Bonhoeffer expanded his discussion of conformation to Christ in *Ethics*,<sup>110</sup> He argued that conformation happens “as the form of Jesus Christ

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>104</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 356.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 360-361.

<sup>110</sup> Rasmussen, 95.

himself so works on us that it molds us, conforming our form to Christ's own (Gal. 4: 9)".<sup>111</sup> Conformation was not pietistic attempt to imitate Christ, but rather a living out of the reality of a new life in Christ, It was in Christ that a person could be truly human for the first time. Living, suffering, dying, and raising with him united people with Christ in love and community. Bonhoeffer believe that the new human in Christ was not an imitation or repetition of Christ but rather completely, and uniquely, their own person in Christ.<sup>112</sup>

Bonhoeffer reaffirmed in *Ethics* that it was in the church that "Christ has taken form among human beings."<sup>113</sup> The church has its meaning and its form only in Jesus Christ – it was never independent of his life, death and resurrection. The church, declared Bonhoeffer, was "not religion but the form of Christ and its taking form among a band of people."<sup>114</sup>

Christ, Bonhoeffer believed, was active in all times and in all places, overcoming and reconciling the world to himself; the question was how he was taking form to fulfill his purpose. For Bonhoeffer, this took place in the church – not the individual's conscience. He wrote,

Ethics as formation is possible only on the basis of the form of Christ present in Christ's church. The church is the place where Jesus Christ's taking form is proclaimed and where it happens. The Christian ethic stands in the service of his Proclamation and this event.<sup>115</sup>

### **Real and Concrete**

Throughout Bonhoeffer's writings, he emphasized the real and the concrete. He was deeply concerned with actual events and examples, and how people responded as Christians. He consistently opposed any theory, philosophy, or abstraction about how one lived one's life that could be used to excuse or rationalize a less than personal and direct response to the needs of others. He wrote,

Still, Christ is not a principle according to which the whole world must be formed. Christ does not proclaim a system of that which would be good today, here and at all times. Christ does not teach an abstract ethic that must be carried out, cost what it may. Christ was not essentially a teacher, a lawgiver, but a human being, a real human being like us... he loved real people...Christ was not concerned about whether "the maxim of an action" could become "a principle of universal law," but whether my action now helps my neighbor to be a human being before God. God did not become an idea, principle, a program, a universally valid belief or a law, God became human.....Christian empowers reality, affirming it as the real human being and thus the ground of all human reality.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 93.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

The “concrete Christian ethic” went beyond ethical stance of formalism or causivity. Bonhoeffer argued that both of them created a conflict between good and the real. But the Christian ethic comes “from the reconciliation of the world with God in the human Jesus Christ, in God’s acceptance of real human being.”<sup>117</sup> Moreover, in different historical contexts, with new questions, tasks and responsibilities, the Christian ethic must be evaluated time and time again.

### Responsible Action

Bonhoeffer’s understanding of responsible or an “ethic of responsibility” has received a great deal of attention from ethicists and scholars.<sup>118</sup> Some believed that it provided the justification for his political activism and others believe that it is an another step in him maturing theological thought.<sup>119</sup>

For our purposes, one of Bonhoeffer’s most explicit discussion of vocation occurred in the section of *Ethics* that dealt with responsibility.<sup>120</sup> Like so much of Bonhoeffer’s theology, responsibility was placed squarely within a person’s life, fully and completely. The life of responsibility was lived out in that relationship.<sup>121</sup> The life of responsibility was lived so that a person before others confessed their faith and lived their life in Christ. A person before Christ was a person who was accountable for others.<sup>122</sup> Being responsible for others in this sense was always based in the faith relationship with Jesus Christ and love for neighbor for the sake of Jesus Christ.<sup>123</sup>

The structure of the responsible life was framed by two boundaries: the link between a person, God, and others, and “the freedom of one’s own life.”<sup>124</sup> Without both the link and the freedom of one’s life, there was no responsibility. The link was in the form of “vicarious representative action” and based in the reality of the every day situation.<sup>125</sup> Freedom was in the form of “self-examination of life and of action and in the venture of a concrete decision.”<sup>126</sup>

Bonhoeffer used the example of a father to explain vicarious representative action. A father acted on behalf of his children, working, caring, providing, and suffering for them. He could not act alone because of his connection to and responsibility for his family. Jesus, without a family, marriage or vocation, lived a life of vicarious representation, in that he lived if for all people. In the same way, all people, through him live a life of vicarious representation.<sup>127</sup> It was a complete surrendering of self for others, without the dangers of self-aggrandizement or a complete focus on the other. Either of these would deny origin, essence, and goal of responsible life in Jesus Christ.<sup>128</sup>

Responsible conduct had to take place in a concrete situation. I could not be pre-determined by an ideology or principles or theory. Nor could it be determined by what as easiest or most expedient in

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>118</sup> Larry Rasmussen identifies it as Bonhoeffer’s core theme in his essay, “The Ethics of Responsible Action,” in *The Cambridge Companion*, 218.

<sup>119</sup> See Kuhns, 126-127.

<sup>120</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 290-298.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>122</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 256.

<sup>123</sup> Rasmussen in *The Cambridge Companion*, 218-119.

<sup>124</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* 257.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Rasmussen called it “moral discernment” in *The Cambridge Companion*, 219.

<sup>127</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 258.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

a given situation. Instead the individual and concrete situation needed to be evaluated, considering many different factors and especially the reality that Jesus Christ has loved, judged and reconciled the world to himself. He was the “Real One” who had borne and fulfilled the essence of history, he himself was the origin, essence and goal of all reality.<sup>129</sup>

Responsible activity also took place in the freedom of a person’s life. Human freedom in this sense was bound only by God and the neighbor. In the end, Bonhoeffer wrote, “Those who are responsible act in their own freedom, without the support of people, conditions, or principles, but nevertheless considering all existing circumstances related to people, general conditions, or principles.”<sup>130</sup> However, in the end a decision should be made, free of conditions or principles, relying on “God who looks upon the heart, weighs the deeds and guides history.”<sup>131</sup> Thus, the responsible act flowed into God’s plan and was understood as ultimate being God’s action.

Obedience and freedom were intertwined in the responsible life. Using Jesus as his example, Bonhoeffer explained that:

Jesus stands before God as the obedient one and as the free one. One, he does not the will of the Father by blindly following the law he has been commanded. As the free one, he affirmed God’s will out of his very own insights, with open eyes and a joyful heart; as if he re-creates it anew out of himself.<sup>132</sup>

He went on to state that “Obedience knows what is good and does it. Freedom dares to act and leaves the judgment of good and evil up to God.”<sup>133</sup> The inner tension between obedience and freedom was part of the responsible life and remained a constant in the Christian’s life. One without the other did not make a truly responsible life.<sup>134</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s nuanced view of vocation as responsible discipleship, grounded in the call of discipleship and lived out in the tension of obedience and freedom, encourages a thoughtful and realistic view of the disciple and the situation. It is a view that challenges the disciple to reflect consciously and deliberately on the impact of one’s decisions, weighing the pros and the cons, and deliberating on God’s direction. He argued against the temptation to blindly follow a set of preconceived principles or the unchallenged direction of a leader by challenging the individual to carefully reflect on their own life, values, and relationship to God and others, when action was required.

This shift to responsible action, carried out as a faithful disciple of Christ, in response to the ordinary and extraordinary circumstances of life is a slightly different perspective on vocation from Luther. In the next section, I compare the views of Bonhoeffer and Luther on vocation.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 263

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 288.



### Bonhoeffer and Luther on Vocation

Discipleship, and I have argued throughout this chapter, remained one of the central questions of Bonhoeffer's life. It is his discussion of discipleship in relation to the church community, and how the disciple understood personal responsibility in relation to God and others, that Bonhoeffer speaks most explicitly about vocation. In this section, I compare these two themes of Bonhoeffer with themes from Luther's view of vocation.

#### Vocation as a Member of the Body of Christ

When Bonhoeffer discussed vocation in *Discipleship*, he re-interpreted the same Biblical text as Luther, "Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called...(1 Corinthians 7: 20)."<sup>135</sup> Bonhoeffer believed that the differences between the call of the first disciples and the call of this Pauline passage could be reconciled in the community of the body of Christ.<sup>136</sup> While one may remain a slave or free in the early sense, one was truly free in the community of Christ because Christ had freed the person from the earthly orders to serve God. Bonhoeffer commented that "to remain bound to God in one's calling or vocation in the midst of the world means to remain a member of the body of Christ within the visible church community."<sup>137</sup>

Luther argued that the call in this passage meant the call to remain in one's station (career, work, occupation or biological order), and thereby supported God's overall plan for creation. He did not connect the individual's vocation as clearly to the church as Bonhoeffer did. Rather, Luther understood vocation as more of a result of justification by grace through faith and one's place of responsibility on earth.

To remain in one's vocation in the world, according to Bonhoeffer, meant to remain "solely for the sake of the body of the Christ who became incarnate – for the sake of the church-community."<sup>138</sup> He contrasted this with other reasons to remain in the world like "the God-given goodness of the world" or "responsibility for the course of the world."<sup>139</sup> Luther, he wrote, believed that Christians lived in the world by God's goodness and engaged in a battle against things of the world. Luther himself left the monastery as a protest against the secularization of Christianity within monasticism.<sup>140</sup>

There were limits to a person's secular vocation. Bonhoeffer argued.<sup>141</sup> When there was a conflict between the space the body of Christ needed, the space necessary for the civic life of its members, and the world's claims, it might become necessary for the disciple to do some evaluation. A public confession of faith could be necessary and then the world may choose to withdraw or attack. Some disciples could lose their professions and begin to suffer as a result of their commitment to the community of Christ.<sup>142</sup>

Bonhoeffer suggested that it was possible for the Christian to live in the world but not be conformed to it.<sup>143</sup> By understanding that all they have belonged to Christ, they were not bound to or controlled

<sup>135</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 237.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-238.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>138</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 260.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>140</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 245.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

by the ordinary things of life. They used them and even prospered but their focus remained on Christ, the church community, and their future home in heaven.<sup>144</sup>

Luther was less friendly toward the idea of people moving out of their calling or station in life. While he would agree that the Christian could and must live in the world (unlike the monastics) and not be conformed to it, he was deeply concerned about maintaining the civil order. This concern, Bonhoeffer and others have argued over the years, is widely believed to have contributed to the rise of Nazism in Germany.<sup>145</sup> The debates continues today.

By the time he wrote *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer's view of discipleship had expanded further. Scholar William Kuhns argues that Bonhoeffer's early thoughts on discipleship, as expressed in *Discipleship*, had moved in his later writing toward "a wider vision of Christian life in the world under the Lordship of Christ, a vision which does not negate discipleship but which includes it in a larger synthesis."<sup>146</sup>

The larger synthesis included Bonhoeffer's understanding of vocation. Kuhns notes that in *Ethics*, the "conclusive moral demand is for conscious responsibility, not naively to one's own "Christian calling," which begs the question, but to the world, where Christ carried out His responsibility."<sup>147</sup>

### Vocation as Personal Responsibility

To adequately define the place of conscious or personal responsibility, argued Bonhoeffer, required a different concept of vocation, Bonhoeffer disagreed with both Max Weber's concept of vocation as a secular occupation and the pseudo-Lutheran view that justified and sanctified secular institutions.<sup>148</sup> Bonhoeffer located vocation in the call to follow Jesus Christ. From Christ perspective this new life was a person's vocation. From the individual's perspective this new life was one of responsibility.<sup>149</sup>

Relating vocation to the call of discipleship helped to eliminate two major, historical misunderstandings of vocation. One was that of secular or cultural Protestantism that identified calling with the fulfilling of secular obligations without understanding the importance of a faith relationship and obedience to Christ. The call of Jesus Christ, Bonhoeffer wrote may lead a person into earthly obligations but it always transcends them.<sup>150</sup>

The second misunderstanding was the misunderstanding of medieval monasticism. Rather than recognizing that the call of Christ was a call to struggle against the world, monasticism chose to withdraw from the world and respond to the world from a place of safety and isolation.

Luther, responding to the latter understanding of vocation, chose to leave the monastery to engage the world but he combined the fulfillment of one's secular vocation with the free conscience of relationship with God.<sup>151</sup> Bonhoeffer believed that this created unnecessary conflicts in the minds and lives of people. He argued that:

In concrete deeds, conscience can be free only by fulfilling one's concrete

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 248-249.

<sup>145</sup> See for instance, Kuhns,69-70.

<sup>146</sup> Kuhns, 102.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>148</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 289.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

Vocation in responsibility to the call of Jesus Christ, that is, only from Knowledge of Jesus Christ's becoming human.<sup>152</sup>

Thus, the place of responsibility was located first in the call of Jesus Christ, to belong to him completely in all that one does not and has including: possessions, people, relationships and work. Vocation was broadened yet again, to include the whole person responding wholeheartedly to Christ in everything one does. However, Bonhoeffer argued that this breaking out took place after due consideration of immediate obligations, the responsibilities of others, the total picture of events, and personal prayer and reflection.<sup>153</sup> The freedom to move beyond the bounds of marriage, family, work, or government had to be understood in relation to the laws God established to order the world and the freedom that Christ won for people in his life, death and resurrection.<sup>154</sup> It was not something to take lightly.

### **Selected Themes from Bonhoeffer for a Contemporary Understanding of Vocation in Adult Religious Education**

There are some noticeable parallels between the world of Bonhoeffer and the world today. Bonhoeffer found himself in a world caught between the world views of liberal Protestant theology, progressive Western culture, and the National Socialists. Today, we are in the midst of a "war on terrorism" that accentuates the differences between the diverse worldviews within Islam, and the multiple worldviews of the Christianized and post-Christian western world.

Bonhoeffer called into question the role of the Christian and the Christian church in response to the Nazi threat. Today, Christians of all theological persuasions, as well as Christian churches from many different Christian traditions, are being challenged to examine their relationship to the government on a number of issues. The "war on terror," recent tax cuts, choices for the Supreme Court, and the response to the hurricanes in the South had raised issues of accountability, leadership, freedom, justice, and the common good for many.

In addition to the relationship between the individual, the church, and the state, a related question has emerged. What is the relationship between personal faith, theology and politics? How does one express one's Christian faith and theology in a pluralistic and secularized world? These questions have taken on new importance today and are being examined and discussed by different people with very different starting points in variety of public forums.

The individual Christians and churches are confronted on a daily basis today with issues of meaning, identity, and direction in response to the many pressures of our globalized economy and technology advances. The rapid pace of change has created a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty that echoes the challenges of Bonhoeffer's time.

What from Bonhoeffer's thought and life can be brought to our discussion of religious education that nurtures Christian vocation in today's world? I believe that there are four major themes that are useful to the development of a new paradigm of Christian vocation: a) Christ is the focus; b) the role of study, prayer, and meditation; c.) responsible action; and d.) Christ existing as church-community.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 292-294.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 296-297.

### **Christ is the Focus**

Bonhoeffer's unrelenting focus on Christ and the meaning of following his call provides a single but multidimensional response to the challenges of contemporary life and Christian vocation. Bonhoeffer's personal and reflective integration of following the call of Christ, based on Biblical, theological, and experiential considerations, offers an example of how one can live faithfully in uncertain times. It also challenges the religious educator and Christian churches today to consider how to encourage seekers and members to be reflective and intentional about their own Christian vocation.

Bonhoeffer's reflective integration of resources from Christian sources, personal experience, and study informed his life and the actions that he took. He began with theological and Biblical study that coalesced in his text, *Discipleship*, and its focus on Christ and the life of discipleship. In many ways, his personal relationship with Christ, strengthened and informed through study, reflection, and experience, came to form his view of vocation as responsible action as he described it in *Ethics*.

His approach is not easy one. He openly admits that discipleship is a life of suffering. It is suffering for others, suffering as witnesses to Christ, and suffering as compassionate people in the midst of great evil and abuse. But, the only way he could make sense of the suffering and the evil of his time was the hope that he had in Jesus Christ and his involvement in the world.

Bonhoeffer did not offer any easy answers to the life of the disciple. It was not, as he so frequently stressed, a set of abstract principles or guidelines, or a political or religious system, rather it was a personal wrestling with, intentional reflection, and action on how the individual and the community obeys the call of Christ.

### **Role of Study, Prayer, and Meditation**

The significance of Bonhoeffer's consistent practice of study, prayer, and meditation in his life and his actions is well documented in both the primary and secondary literature. His knowledge of Scripture and theology, his personal meditation on Scripture, and his belief in prayer, both personal and intercessory, is woven through much of what he wrote. The integration of his study, prayer, and meditation in response to the events of his life and his times challenge Christians today to do their own considered exploration. The ability to acknowledge and explore the connections between the Scriptures, Christians sources and history, and one's own experience is an expressed need of many people today as they seek meaning and direction. The personal application and experience of prayer in an individual and corporate setting and the study and reflection on Biblical and theological texts encourages the individual to link their faith and their life. It provides the foundation to how a person understands and lives out their vocation as a disciple of Christ.

In religious education that encourages Christian vocation, faithful living in uncertain times, the role of prayer, study, and meditation is emphasized. Through private and corporate reflective interactions people can be encouraged in their own prayer, study, and meditation as they explore and consider their past, current, and future actions. Reflective interactions, between the person and God, and the person and others, gives people new insight and new direction as they seek to follow the call of discipleship.

### **Responsible Action**

For Bonhoeffer, the responsible action of the disciple was based in a reflective and respectful understanding of one's relationship to Christ in the world. It was not bound by unconsidered principles or a universal law (Kant) or slavish adherence to a doctrinal stance or authority. Nor was it solely

situational. Rather it was bound by one's responsibility to God through Jesus, one's responsibility to others, and the freedom of one's own life. The disciple weighs all those factors as she seeks to discern her direction and then acts on it.

Responsible action is another significant contribution that Bonhoeffer makes to religious education that fosters Christian vocation. Bonhoeffer's understanding of responsible action encourages the person to be thoughtful and intentional about what they do. It is not a knee jerk reaction to an issue or a problem instead it involves careful consideration on several different inter-related levels. One level is theological reflection. Another is one's role and responsibilities in relation to the issue or the problem. A third level is one's role and responsibilities in relation to the issue or the problem. A third level is how one's relationships may be affected by one's decisions. And yet another level is one's trust and faith in God, through Jesus Christ. Responsible action means being familiar with Christian sources and history, reflecting personally and communally on them and the issue, and taking faithful and intentional action.

People today are seeking ways to discern, evaluate, and make life-changing decisions. They are looking for models and resources that help them decisions and take steps to improve their lives and the lives of others. Many Christian theological traditions have their own a rich heritage of various approaches to these questions; responsible action in light of one's Christian vocation offers another approach.

### **Christ Existing as Church-Community**

Bonhoeffer's unique emphasis on Christ embodied in the church-community offers a strong justification for Christian churches to be involved in the world, and the disciple to be involved as a member of the "community of disciples." While the institutional church has been less than Christ-like in many ways throughout history, Bonhoeffer believed that it had a critical place in society and needed to take its responsibilities seriously as a corrective to the government. Bonhoeffer eventually came to closely identify the church with the suffering and bearing of the injustices of others while remaining grounded in the traditions of preaching, teaching, and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

The role of faith community in religious education that nurtures Christian vocation is important. Even today, Bonhoeffer's view of Christ embodied in the church community, the role of the church in the world, and the disciple's involvement in the church in response to the suffering and injustice of the world challenges traditional views of the church and how the church relates to the world. It offers some interesting possibilities for future exploration and discussion about Christian vocation in a postmodern world. Bonhoeffer contributes a biblically and theologically informed process of reflection and action to religious education that nurtures Christian vocation. He challenged people to live their Christian vocation in the real and concrete activities or everyday life. In today's postmodern, uncertain, and rapidly changing world, his practical and pastoral perspectives still resonate with people.

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