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A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION AND CRITIQUE
OF THE ETHICS OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

by

David W. Clark

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School,
Loyola University, Chicago, in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Master of Arts

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PREFACE

This paper is a preliminary investigation of the "Christian Ethics" of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in terms of its self-consistency and sufficiency for moral guidance. As Christian, Bonhoeffer's ethic serves as a concrete instance of the ways in which religious dogmas are both regulative and formative of human behavior. Accordingly, this paper will study (a) the internal consistency of the revealed data and structural principles within Bonhoeffer's system, and (b) the significance of biblical directives for moral decisions. The question of Bonhoeffer's "success," then, presents a double problem. First, one needs to test the intrinsic clarity of Bonhoeffer's relationship of the supernatural and natural orders. Secondly, one needs to consider the adequacy of his Christian ethics in terms of man's moral needs.

In evaluating the ethical system of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, it is necessary to realize the incomplete and fragmentary character of many of his writings. Also to be noted is the absence of a definitive biography of his life. The estimation of Bonhoeffer's moral theory is complicated further by his many letters, notes and lectures. While the latter demonstrate the range and insight of his mind, their lack of systematic treatment makes it difficult to get any confident grasp of the author's meaning.

There is evidence of an ethical concern throughout all of Bonhoeffer's writings. However, Bonhoeffer attempted only one major work in the field of ethics, and this systematic effort was interrupted by his imprisonment in 1943. Nonetheless, this work was edited and published in 1949 in spite of its incomplete stage. Entitled Ethics, it must be interpreted in light of the complete corpus of Bonhoeffer's writings, as well as of that information about the author which can be derived from his family and associates. In this manner, one can hope to comprehend Bonhoeffer's most mature statement on the character of Christian ethics.

For easy reference, all quotations are taken from the English editions of Bonhoeffer's works. These translations are more accessible than the German compendium (Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. I-IV, Eberhard Bethge, ed., Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1958-1961).

I am grateful to Father Edward Maziarz, C.P.P.S., both for his advice and critical comments which have directed this thesis to its final form. Many problems of content and style were avoided by his careful judgment. My thanks also go to Mrs. George Connelly who proofread and typed the final draft. It goes without saying that they are not responsible for any defects that might remain.

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INTRODUCTION

An enduring problem in the history of philosophy concerns the relationship between faith and reason. Different theological premises can cause different viewpoints about ontology, anthropology and ethics. Ethical systems usually vary according to the theological positions which they implicitly or explicitly hold. Any information concerning the nature of man gained from Revelation is therefore relevant for conceiving of man's specific happiness and the human activities necessary to its achievement.

When Christianity serves as the context of the ethical discussion, the Fall of Man and the Incarnation are two pivotal doctrines that largely determine the place of reason in the formulation of ideal behavior. The effects of the primordial sin condition the capacities and limitations of human nature. Again, the reality of the Incarnation affects human destiny, and it is possible, therefore, that the Redemption is operative in one's definition of human nature. For example, the traditional Catholic doctrine on the results of Original Sin states that man's essential mode of being was merely modified. This dogma is contrary to the orthodox Calvinist view that man's nature was changed radically. Subsequently, because of various sectarian interpretations of scripture, a different status and validity

is granted to rational and natural norms. Revelation is influential in one's ethics not only because the Bible contains moral directives but also because it is pertinent to the origins, nature and destiny of man.

This paper assumes that morality is a problem of rational deliberation as well as of religious beliefs. The freedom of man to choose between possible modes of behavior and a sense of right and wrong to guide such choices are prerequisites for an "ethical" system. If these assumptions are not granted by the theologian, then morality becomes simply a matter of biblical exegesis. A proper coordination of moral theology and moral philosophy seems necessary for the concrete direction of one's life. Therefore, theology and philosophy must remain open to mutual criticism. Philosophy can clarify the notions of faith, illuminate the implications of revealed truth and provide theologians with a criterion for a viable terminology. However, it can perform this function only in partnership with faith. If the theological elements of some moral theory are so privileged as to exclude rational analysis, then perhaps that theory is also beyond clarification and development.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran theologian; his career was motivated by the attempt to expound the doctrines of Martin Luther. His work called Ethics was inspired by such theological concerns. The book is admirable as a logical and concrete application of the Lutheran dogmas of Sin and Reconciliation to the problems of 20th century morality. The current popularity of

Bonhoeffer testifies to the honesty and insight of his analysis of the complexities of ethical decision, the nature of conscience, the social effects of ethical criteria and previous ethical theories. However, Ethics claims to be more than a theory of moral theology; the author states that it is a critique of all ethical systems. "Christian Ethics," in Bonhoeffer's opinion, invalidates all knowledge of good and evil.¹ He claims to have evidence about human nature that is not available to philosophical investigation and, moreover, which renders rational study useless.

The validity of a philosophical analysis of Bonhoeffer's Christian ethic rests on the assumption that reason as well as faith is necessary for the proper orientation of life. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer's denial of a philosophical dimension in ethical considerations seems to lead to incongruities. In the first place, Bonhoeffer's rejection of any philosophical approach to morality is itself a philosophical position and therefore open to rational rebuttal. Secondly, Bonhoeffer consciously utilizes philosophical (Kantian) argumentation to prove the bankruptcy of natural morality. As a result, it follows that Bonhoeffer's historical accuracy and epistemology are questionable. Thirdly, the meaning of Bonhoeffer's terminology is difficult. For instance, what is the significance of the term "ethical" in Bonhoeffer's system, since he considers unaided human nature inca-

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 17.

pable of choosing the right course of action? Fourthly, his theology is admittedly Lutheran and surely not the only interpretation of revelation that might be of consequence in moral theology. All of these reasons for applying philosophical criteria to the ethics of Bonhoeffer are reducible to a basic presupposition that faith and reason are interdependent in evaluating the quality of one's life.

The main purpose of this thesis is to correctly understand Bonhoeffer's moral theory and recognize the originality and sensitivity of his ethical proposals. Criticism is not the prime objective of this investigation. The chapters of this study will attempt, first, to determine the place of ethics within the context of Bonhoeffer's life and thought (Chapter I). Then, Bonhoeffer's definition of theology and philosophy and his notion of human existence will be discussed as the foundations of his ethical system (Chapter II). This paper will then turn to an examination and critique of Bonhoeffer's theory of a viable Christian ethic (Chapters III and IV). Only if these areas are researched properly can an integral perspective of Bonhoeffer's motives and achievements in the area of ethics be obtained.

CHAPTER I

THE PLACE OF ETHICS IN DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S LIFE AND THEOLOGY

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a theologian whose life spanned the era of the two World Wars. His dialectical theology was an effort to bring the gospel down to earth and place it at the center of life. He interpreted the Christian message for a generation that felt the rise of Adolf Hitler and experienced the crises that National Socialism presented to Western Civilization. His writings and activities made him a spokesman of the Confessing Church of Germany, the center of theological resistance to Hitler, while his convictions also demanded his active participation in the political resistance. Bonhoeffer's ecclesiastical position and historical awareness revealed the implications and consequences of Nazism with such clarity that he envisioned a new morality to render Christian attitudes operative. The attempt to formulate and live a modern ethic led to Bonhoeffer's execution in the Flossenberg Prison on the 9th of April, 1945.

It was Bonhoeffer's historical situation and the concrete nature of his theology that caused him to turn to the matter of ethics. Bonhoeffer's ethical approach was historically conditioned by the German post-war reconstruction and the pressures of Nazi opposition. The twentieth century revealed forces that

exceeded the restraints of nineteenth century morality. The Third Reich created questions for which previous ethics had no answers. It is understandable that the theologian intent upon defining the mode of being of a Christian would feel it necessary to conceptualize that behavior proper to the contemporary believer. Bonhoeffer's final work--his Ethics--was an attempt to establish morals in a manner consistent with the circumstances of his time and adequate to its ethical needs. Indeed, Ethics as his final word and martyrdom as his final act are correlatives and indicate that the context for understanding Bonhoeffer's moral theory is the dialectic of his theology and his life.

To follow the evolution of Bonhoeffer's ethical theory, it is necessary to accept the fact that he was first and foremost a theologian. Moreover, it is obvious that his theology shows stages of change consistent with his professional activities. Three general periods are evident in Bonhoeffer's life; these stages further serve to categorize his theological achievement. The first period, from his birth in 1906 to his acceptance of a London pastorate in 1933, covers his academic career. In the period from 1933 to approximately 1940, Bonhoeffer's activity centered around the ecumenical movement and the struggle within Germany between the Confessing Church, which opposed Hitler, and the State Church, which supported Hitler. The third and final stage of Bonhoeffer's life, from 1940 to 1945, concerned his involvement in the political resistance to Hitler and his lengthy imprisonment.

There is debate as to which theological concern is dominant during each of these periods,¹ but general agreement as to the evidence of three stages. This consensus indicates the close relationship that exists between Bonhoeffer's empirical situation and his theology. These three periods also show the influences operative in the ethical stance of Bonhoeffer. Therefore, these stages will constitute the order of this investigation.

Home and University, 1906-1933

The formative period of Bonhoeffer's life stretches from his birth in Breslau in 1906 to his exodus from the University of Berlin in October, 1933. The dual factors of home and university condition the facets of Bonhoeffer's thought, and influence the later stages of his theology, systematic and moral. The concern for ethics is not pervasive during these years, yet certain precedents and directives are evident.

Of the formative elements in Bonhoeffer's life and thought it is necessary to seriously consider his home. Indeed, Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich's close friend and official biographer, advises that "Bonhoeffer's life could be understood in terms of the Bonhoeffer family. The traits of his character, his decision

¹John D. Godesy says that the theme of Christology is the key to Bonhoeffer's thought. The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 265-66. Eberhard Bethge's opinion is that the "concretion of revelation" is Bonhoeffer's unifying concept. "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought," The Chicago Theological Seminary Register, LI (February, 1961), p. 3.

to take up the study of theology, even his martyrdom--all have their sources in the family."² The home was upper-middle class, scientifically orientated and secular minded. It was strongly conditioned by the personality of Dietrich's father.

Karl Bonhoeffer was a doctor who accepted a chair in Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Berlin in 1912. He was a demanding father, but not domineering. He raised his eight children in a thoroughly academic atmosphere and instilled in them an appreciation of leisure and culture. He was aloof and reserved, demanding that even his children demonstrate only adult qualities. However, punishment was never physical or coercive; rather, it was simply done with such mannerisms as an ironical smile or a raise in the eyebrows.³ Karl Bonhoeffer reared his children as Lutherans, but his scientific bent of mind reduced the religious mood of the family to a humanism of responsible action and concern for others.

Dietrich's mother, Paula, came from a long line of distinguished ecclesiastics, her grandfather being Carl von Hase, a noted church historian of the nineteenth century. She gave Dietrich his physical appearance, exuberant spirit and feeling for music. Her grief at the war death of her second son, Walter,

²Ved Metha, The New Theologian (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 146. Metha's chapter on "Pastor Bonhoeffer" is the result of interviews with personal friends and professional associates of Bonhoeffer.

³This appraisal is given by Sabine Leibholz, Dietrich's twin sister, in her article "Childhood and Home" in I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer (New York: 1966), p. 21.

may have pre-disposed Dietrich to take a pacifistic position in the Second World War.⁴ At any rate, her warmth offset the cool self-control of her husband and made the home a life-long influence on the unmarried Dietrich.

The careers of the Bonhoeffer children were in tune with either the scientific concerns of the father or the ministerial precedents in their lineage. Karl Friedrich, the eldest, was a biochemist; Walter was studying to be a zoologist before his death at the front; Klaus was an adventurer and traveled extensively. These three eldest children were intellectual and agnostic; their interests concerned scientific subjects. They reinforced the secular temperament of the Bonhoeffer household.

From temperament and reaction to the successes of his older brothers, Dietrich decided to study theology when he was fourteen years old. Dietrich, with Sabine and Suzanne, comprised the "little ones" of the family. He realized that he had slight chance of distinguishing himself in an area previously entered by another brother. Karl Friedrich was considered the most intelligent of the children while Walter was the most heroic in the eyes of the parents.⁵ Dietrich, therefore, chose the study of Hebrew during his last two years at the Gymnasium. He thereby displayed a commitment to the ministry even though it was distasteful to the family. "The Bonhoeffer's were not a church-going

⁴Metha, p. 148.

⁵Ibid., pp. 149-50.

family and all the family baptisms, weddings and funerals were performed in the house by an uncle, who was a pastor, and even so, was the victim of a certain amount of derision."⁶ However, Dietrich's competitive spirit⁷ needed a field to call his own, and at seventeen he began taking theology courses at the University of Tubingen.

Only a fragmented picture can be drawn of Bonhoeffer's home life. However, it had a formative importance in his ethics. A search for the element of continuity in Bonhoeffer's thought, for the source of the theme of "worldly Christianity," of an "ethics of responsibility," or for the empirical flavor of his final period, has certain origins within the Bonhoeffer home. Reference must now be made to the extra-familial and academic forces that impressed Bonhoeffer's first period, simply because of the lack of an authoritative biography.⁸ Enough has been said, however, to predict a certain regard for the concrete in his moral theology, and a predominant interest in the ethical decisions

⁶Ibid., p. 151.

⁷The need to excel within Bonhoeffer is often mentioned by those who knew him. Emmi Bonhoeffer, Klaus' wife, mentions his will to win at sports when a child. I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 35. At Union Theological Seminary, he told Paul Lehmann he would not play tennis with anyone who was not proficient at the game. Ibid., p. 43. He told Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann that he wished to die young so that he would not have to know the decline of his abilities. Metha, op. cit., p. 143.

⁸Bonhoeffer's close friend, Eberhard Bethge, is presently preparing the official biography of his life, but the magnitude of the work will delay publication for a number of years.

demanding by the war conditions of Germany. Moreover, the importance afforded responsibility and obedience as ethical functions, and his distrust of conscience as a moral guide, have some resemblance to the structure of his early education, his Lutheran instruction and his father's views on human psychology.

Tutorial influences, evident and consistent throughout Bonhoeffer's life, began with his study of theology and philosophy at the University of Tübingen, 1923-24. Adolf Schlatter was the dominant theological influence on Bonhoeffer. He gave Bonhoeffer's theology a biblical orientation. Bonhoeffer's personal copies of Schlatter's works are filled with marginal notes and were referred to in the preparation of nearly all his later sermons and exegeses. Bonhoeffer's philosophical studies emphasized epistemology and later he used the idealist theory of knowledge prevalent in the German universities as a defense against any intrusion of philosophy into the area of ultimate reality.

The following year, Bonhoeffer entered the University of Berlin to study under the men whose scholarship constituted a Lutheran renaissance. Bonhoeffer was impressed by Adolf von Harnack and Reinhold Seeberg, the latter being his academic advisor. However, the dominant inspiration during Bonhoeffer's doctoral study, indeed, of his entire theological career, was Karl Barth whom he never had in class. Bonhoeffer's diligent reading of Barth's "Epistle to the Romans" and "Church Dogmatics" is evident in Bonhoeffer's first dissertation which awarded him the licentiate in theology at the early age of twenty-one. The

Communion of Saints: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church (1927) clearly shows Bonhoeffer's association with Barth on the centrality of Revelation and his alliance with the majority of the Berlin faculty in reaction to "Liberal Theology"—an eighteenth century humanization of the bible.

By January of 1928, Bonhoeffer had finished his first examination for the ministry and began his year of curateship in a German parish of Barcelona, Spain. It was at this time that his first formal concern with ethics is evident. The pastoral work of counselling required his occupation with moral problems. Moreover, the method and problems that he accepted theologically, i.e., the dialectical theology common with Barth and the Reformation concern of relating gospel and law, necessitated an increasingly concrete and systematic explication of dogma. The advice of Professor Seeberg at this juncture was catalytic. He wrote to his student that "the history of ethics and still more of morality is a sphere in which a young man might well make a corner for himself today, perhaps with the aim of writing a history of ethical dogma from the Sermon on the Mount up to our own days."⁹ Seeberg had directed Bonhoeffer's dissertation and must have noticed the scattered references to ethics¹⁰ and judged them

⁹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936, Vol. I, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 36.

¹⁰This dissertation touches on ethics but not with a degree of purposefulness or organization that deserves comment here. These references will be developed in the systematic analysis of

promising enough to suggest their development. Just before leaving Barcelona, Bonhoeffer addressed his congregation on "What Is a Christian Ethic?",¹¹ formulating his first organized attempt at a theology of ethics. Again, Bonhoeffer's approach was dialectical, and he committed himself to a solution of the dilemma stated as the antithesis of gospel and law, of grace and nature. This reconciliatory purpose displayed by Bonhoeffer's original statement on ethics is present throughout his work as its developmental force.¹² The accurate statement of the relationship of the Gospel and the Law was a primary motive behind Bonhoeffer's moral theology.

After a year in Barcelona, Bonhoeffer returned to Berlin to write his inaugural dissertation, entitled Act and Being.¹³

later chapters. For the present, to substantiate the assertion that Bonhoeffer's theological studies included ethical concerns, see Bonhoeffer's The Communion of Saints: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church, trans. R. Gregor Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 23, 29, and 40 for comments on historical ethical systems; pp. 32 and 35 for the ethical element in his anthropology.

¹¹No Rusty Swords, pp. 39-48.

¹²Gerhard Ebeling assesses this problem as the key to Bonhoeffer's theology. Word and Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), chap. II, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer."

¹³Pastor Zimmermann gives the following information about the genesis of Act and Being: "For centuries after the Reformation the churches of the German states were separated from real life. They were governed by the states. In all that time, the only alternative to the state ethics was pietism. In 1919, when the Kirchenbund, a very loose federation of the independent provincial churches, established in 1871, finally got a little authority, and there could be such a thing as a church social ethic that was different from the social ethic of the state, this independence created a lot of problems, because the Church had no

This thesis was necessary for acceptance into the theological faculty of the University. With its approval Bonhoeffer gave his inaugural address, "Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology"¹⁴ on July 31, 1930. These two efforts give Bonhoeffer's most extensive reference to philosophy. Through bibliography and text they give valuable information concerning the sources accepted within his own position and his analysis of various philosophical systems.

Philosophy filters through Bonhoeffer's theological premises. Two fundamental concepts of Lutheranism are central to Bonhoeffer's search for rational categories capable of expressing the content of revelation--that man is "incapax infiniti"¹⁵ and that the human heart is "curvum in se."¹⁶ Critical philosophy monopolizes philosophical discussions, demonstrating Bonhoeffer's preoccupation with the late Modern period in the history of philosophy and his acceptance of the Kantian theory of knowledge. That human knowledge never grasps more than its own forms is consistent with these Lutheran dogmas and supports his conclusion of

experience in ruling itself. Bonhoeffer's book "Act and Being" was concerned with this problem: What is a Christian ethic in everyday life? This problem became all the more important when the Church capitulated to the state once again, under Nazism..." Metha, p. 143.

¹⁴No Rusty Swords, pp. 50-69.

¹⁵Act and Being, p. 83. Also used three times in Bonhoeffer's inaugural lecture.

¹⁶Act and Being, pp. 32, 47, 89, and 156. Also quoted once in "Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology."

philosophy's final deficiency. Bonhoeffer's familiarity with this period of German philosophy testifies to both the philosophical exposure he had received academically and to a regulating factor in his ethical theory, namely, that reason is incapable of reaching objective reality or morality. This position is proposed on a theological basis¹⁷ and defended by the Kantian doctrine of man's epistemological isolation.

In recognizing this trend of thought and its origins it should also be noted that these works show considerable study and knowledge of publications on ethics. Both individual works, such as Max Scheler's Formalism in Ethics and an Ethic of Material Value, and presentations of a more general nature, such as Wilhelm Windlebrand's History of Modern Philosophy and Emanuel Hirsch's Philosophies of Idealism, show Bonhoeffer's familiarity with ethical systems. Investigation of these contrary positions surely added precision and sharpness to the differences that Bonhoeffer felt between "Christian ethics" and moral philosophy. Furthermore, with the dialectic of historical systems, Bonhoeffer clarified his own thought.

Before beginning a full-time position on the Berlin faculty, Bonhoeffer received a Sloane Fellowship for post-doctoral study at Union Theological Seminary in New York. In September of 1930, Bonhoeffer arrived at Union Seminary to take courses and to

¹⁷"The thought imprisoned in itself, is the true expression of man questioning himself (or the world) in statu corruptionis." No Rusty Swords, p. 60.

absorb the American scene. Two of the four papers extant from this period concern ethics--"The Character and Ethical Consequence of Religious Determinism" and "The Religious Experience of Grace and the Ethical Life."¹⁸

This intensified activity in the area of ethics may be an indication of the influence of Professor Eugene Lyman and the practical quality of American philosophy. Pragmatism was totally foreign to Bonhoeffer's philosophical background, yet "he applied his German vigour and determination to a mastery, particularly of Williams James, under Lyman's guidance."¹⁹ Besides this factor, ministerial work with the negroes of New York increased Bonhoeffer's sensitivity to the moral issue of racism due to his cultural appreciation of the negro mentality. Only among the negroes did Bonhoeffer hear the gospel "really preached and accepted with great welcome and visible emotion."²⁰ These two exposures served Bonhoeffer well in the coming years. The imprint of William James' philosophy is evident in the sections on responsibility, and the meaning of the future for ethical considerations in the essays Bonhoeffer wrote from prison.²¹ The negro problem

¹⁸Godsey, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁹I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 43.

²⁰No Rusty Swords, p. 113. This observation is included in Bonhoeffer's address giving his impressions on American theology, called "Religion without Reformation."

²¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953), p. 20 ff.

was analogous to the ethical decisions entailed in the Aryan Clauses of the Third Reich.

Bonhoeffer stopped in Bonn on his return to Germany in late July of 1931 in order to speak with Karl Barth. Bonhoeffer's high esteem for Barth and his theological position only increased with this personal encounter.²² Agreement existed between the two scholars except in the area of ethics. Bonhoeffer's own estimation of the disagreement is as follows:

We very soon came to the problem of ethics and had a long discussion. He would not make concessions to me where I expected that he would have had to. Besides the one great light in the night, he said, there were also many other little lamps, so called "relative ethical criteria;" he could not, however, make their significance and application and nature comprehensible to me--we didn't get beyond his reference to the Bible. Finally he thought that I was making grace into a principle and killing everything else with it. Of course I disputed the first point and wanted to know why everything else should not be killed.²³

This debate clarified Bonhoeffer's ethical stance to himself. With the Barth-Bonhoeffer discussion, the main ingredients of Dietrich's moral theory are evident. From this point, the development of Bonhoeffer's ethics was effected by external, environmental factors more than by intrinsic, logical deductions. It is interesting that changing circumstances will give Bonhoeffer a concern for principles that are "relatively absolute"²⁴

²²At this time, Bonhoeffer wrote to a friend, Erwin Sutz: "I don't think that I have ever regretted any thing that I have failed to do in my theological past as much as the fact that I did not come here [Bonn] sooner." No Rusty Swords, p. 122.

²³No Rusty Swords, p. 121.

²⁴Bonhoeffer, Ethics, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 239.

which at this time were incomprehensible to him.

On his return to Berlin, Bonhoeffer settled down to university life, but with a growing involvement in both the ecclesiastical and the political problems of Germany. During his two years as a Privatdozent or lecturer, Bonhoeffer conducted courses in the history of twentieth century systematic theology, the nature of the church, creation and sin, and Christology, as well as seminars on the idea of philosophy in Protestant theology, Christian ethics, contemporary theological literature and Hegel's philosophy of religion.²⁵ The content of these lectures is lost except for the application that they found within Bonhoeffer's ecclesiastical and ecumenical addresses.²⁶

It is necessary to realize the historical developments of these crucial years, to see the significance of Bonhoeffer's growing activism. The power of Adolf Hitler was increasing and having repercussions within clerical circles. The German church was split under the pressure. One faction tended towards state domination while the Confessing Church reacted to such external motivation as un-Christian. Much of this ecclesiastical infighting was carried on through the organizations of the ecumenical movement which further served the German resistance by publicizing the actual state of affairs, both religious and political,

²⁵Godsey, op. cit., p. 78 ff.

²⁶Bethge has reconstructed the course on Christology from student notes. His findings are contained in a volume called Christ the Center (Harper and Row, 1960).

within Germany. With his appointment in September, 1931, as Youth Secretary for the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, Bonhoeffer officially entered the ecumenical movement. His university position, the completion of the draft of Creation and Fall, and the theological basis of his controversy with the National Christians, portray Bonhoeffer as very much the scholar. However, the political situation demanded ever more clear applications of Bonhoeffer's dogmatic principles.

One such application was the "orders of preservation" that Bonhoeffer developed during the Theological Conference for Ecumenical Youth Work in Berlin, April, 1932. Professor Stahlin and Pastor Peters of the State Church spoke for recognition of the "orders of creation" in theology, which simultaneously could be a foundation for the historical determinism that Nazism advocated. In opposition, Bonhoeffer demanded recognition of the fallen nature of the world and the action of Christ as the sole justification of any order within this corrupted world. These "orders of preservation" are the source of Bonhoeffer's final proposals on the "natural" and the "Penultimate." It is at this point that Bonhoeffer's ethics is cut off consciously and in principle from any natural or rational criterion of right and wrong, i.e., any Natural Law ethic.

Later that same year, Bonhoeffer gave a paper to the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia on "A Theological Basis for

the World Alliance?".²⁷ He developed his ideas on the "orders of preservation" and also denied the possibility of state intervention on the grounds of either the ambiguity of the gospel message or the non-political character of Christianity. The former aspect was a development of his Barcelona sermon on "The Question of a Christian Ethic" and its investigation of the relationship of gospel and law. If the ambiguities of the bible were allowed to inactivate the Christian, then the commandments were meaningless. Therefore, Bonhoeffer proposes that the Law is always concrete, always definite in this situation. The reality of the moment determines the various biblical attitudes and directives on war to either "engage in this war" or "do not engage in this war." The gospel as preached today holds the unequivocal law. Moreover, the demand for Christian responsibility that was natural in such eventful times was developed as the Christian's necessary participation in the orders of preservation, or those conditions that are susceptible to the "new creation of Christ." Bonhoeffer, then, takes exception to Kant's moral theory, though he does not repudiate the Kantian theory of knowledge.²⁸ Bonhoeffer holds that the nature of law as preached constitutes some things

²⁷No Rusty Swords, pp. 157-173.

²⁸In spite of Bonhoeffer's acceptance with the findings of critical epistemology, he believed that Kant's development of Formalism in morality was questionable. "It is wrong to say that only the will can be good." No Rusty Swords, p. 171. As early as The Communion of Saints, he had taken exception to Kant's ethics, because "from many different starting points in his ethic, Kant could have destroyed his own epistemology." Communion of Saints, p. 211, n. 6.

as good.

In 1933, the situation in Germany rapidly deteriorated. Hitler became Chancellor; the "German Christians" gained 70% of the vote in the General Church election and Ludwig Muller became the national bishop. Just two days after Hitler's election, Bonhoeffer attacked the "leadership principle" in a radio broadcast²⁹ only to be cut off before the completion of the address. In this talk Bonhoeffer proposed the distinction between "ultimate" and "penultimate" to categorize those authorities which have an absolute or merely a relative claim to the Christian conscience. The state leader was relegated only a relative authority. When the state church accepted the Aryan Clauses which forbade church office to the Jews, Bonhoeffer immediately attacked their un-Christian premise³⁰ and worked with Martin Niemoller on a "Pastor's Emergency League" to help the clerical victims of this anti-semitism. Bonhoeffer's decisive analysis of Hitler's program was remarkable in regard to the early stage and complexity of Nazism. Few saw the consequences to the state or church caused by National Socialism, with such clarity as Bonhoeffer. The consequent sense of responsibility carried Bonhoeffer from the University of Berlin to a parish in London and the task of interpreting the state of affairs in Germany to the world. An

²⁹No Rusty Swords, pp. 190-204.

³⁰"The Church and the Jewish Question," No Rusty Swords, pp. 221-229.

ethical system that not only distinguished the decisions possible but also carried one from the state of indecision to one of responsible activity was necessary.

Ecclesiastical Period, 1933-1939

Bonhoeffer's period of pure academic concern terminated with his departure for a London pastorate. He thus began a time of intense pastoral activity. This middle period bridged the academician and the conspirator; it saw the transformation of the theologian into a church spokesman. Consideration of Bonhoeffer's ethical theory until 1933 is mainly of the influences of home and university--his cultural, intellectual and religious environment. Theologically, Bonhoeffer's interests had centered on the nature of the church. In the transition to a more ecclesiastical mode of activity, Bonhoeffer's theological attentions focused on Hermeneutics and his ethical awareness intensified. True, much of Bonhoeffer's ethics was implicit in the sources he consciously or unconsciously accepted, but no systematic program was given. Bonhoeffer's intentions and vocabulary were still dogmatic. The conditions encountered during this second period from 1933 to 1939 were to stamp Bonhoeffer's ethics with their practical exigencies.

To approach this phase in the amplification of Bonhoeffer's thought, it is useful to make his position as rector of the Finkenwald seminary the context of discussion. In this capacity, Bonhoeffer was both the practical churchman, representing the

interests and intellectualism of the Confessing Church and the pastor concerned with guiding the education and spiritual development of the seminarians. His writings of this period can be similarly classified by division into the articles and addresses whose motive was church discipline and those longer works whose purpose was spiritual direction even though both forms use the method of biblical exegesis. In these two respects, Bonhoeffer attempted to practice the theory of his academic period, which effort led to his conception of a major work in ethics.

The six years covered by this second stage are ones of growing disillusionment for the churchman. They begin in London with Bonhoeffer's introduction to the bishop of Chichester, a leader of the World Alliance. Together they planned a program to bring the pressures available through the ecumenical movement to bear on the internal affairs of Germany. But, prophetically, Bonhoeffer also was showing an interest in the resistance methods of Mahat Gandhi. Only the call from the Confessing Church to lead their seminary in Pomerania prevented his journey to India.³¹

Four papers deserve mention as indicators of the mentality of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiastical work: "The Confessing Church and the Ecumenical Movement,"³² "The Question of the Boundries of the

³¹Such interest was not new. At Barcelona Bonhoeffer read extensively in Buddhism and he had planned to visit Gandhi in India at the end of his first American tour only to have his trip cancelled when he could find no one to accompany him. Such interest was consistent with Bonhoeffer's own pacifistic position towards a possible war effort by Germany.

³²No Rusty Swords, pp. 326-344.

Church and Church Union,"³³ "Statements about the Power of the Keys and Church Discipline in the New Testament,"³⁴ and "Our Way According to the Testimony of Scripture."³⁵ With progressive emphasis, Bonhoeffer demands that the church is not an ideal or a program (these are always ineffective). It is not just a spiritual influence but rather the hard reality of God's living word. Consequently, what the times require is not "our own realization of our own aims, but obedience."³⁶ Any legalism could corrupt the Confessing Church, and therefore, Bonhoeffer's progressive concern was that obedience to the Word and not adherence to any principles was the spirit of Christian ethics. Again, the problem of gospel and law, freedom and duty was central, though for different reasons.

Early in 1938, Bonhoeffer showed literary signs of his growing disenchantment with the church resistance due to internal tensions and open Nazi oppression. At this time he made his first contacts with the political resistance. Moreover, he articulated this disappointment in his letter to the clergy of Pomerania saying, "The church struggle can be law or gospel. At the moment it has become law...."³⁷ The point at issue was the

³³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1935-1939. Vol. II, ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) pp. 75-96.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 149-160.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 173-193.

³⁶No Rusty Swords, p. 344.

³⁷The Way to Freedom, p. 168.

inability of the bible to define or justify a concrete plan of action: Scriptural proof cannot be given to demonstrate the right or wrong of a particular course or act. The hesitation within the Confessing Church while it searched Revelation for a directive was jeopardizing the whole venture. To avoid this dilemma, Bonhoeffer noted that the bible "is not meant to be an insurance policy for our ways."³⁸ The indecision of the Confessing Church was typical of a rationalistic ethic. To Bonhoeffer's mind, the only realistic and creative solution was responsible action done in faith. Ultimately, of course, this is the Lutheran doctrine that man is justified by faith, not works, but this premise was brought home emphatically by the experience of the Confessing Church.

The Nazi effort to crush the opposition began in earnest after the 1936 Olympics in Berlin and had two important results in Bonhoeffer's mind: first, Nazism cut off the Confession from its international contacts, and, secondly, Nazism restricted the outlook of the Confessing Church to self-preservation. In 1939, Bonhoeffer left Germany in spite of the imminence of war, convinced that the Confessing Church's international contacts had to be maintained. Moreover, he did not want his pacifism to further endanger the status of the Confession.

This was the final effort of the ecclesiastic to render the church of the resistance effective. However, the decision to

³⁸Ibid., p. 197.

leave Germany had important repercussions in Bonhoeffer's thought. The struggle of conscience deciding whether he was running away or genuinely motivated in leaving Germany gave purpose and direction to his wish to write on Christian ethics.³⁹ The importance of this mental battle in Bonhoeffer's estimation is contained in the passages he added to his diary at this time.

It is remarkable how I am never quite sure about the motives for any of my decisions...The reasons one gives for an action to others and to one's self are certainly inadequate. One can give a reason for everything. In the last resort, one acts from a level which remains hidden from us. So one can only ask God to judge us and to forgive us. (20th June, 1939)⁴⁰

However, he concluded he was wrong to come to America. While returning to Germany he added to his diary:

Perhaps I have learnt more in this month than in a whole year, nine years ago; at any rate, I have acquired some important insights for all future decisions. Probably the visit will have a great effect on me. (7th July, 1939)⁴¹

As a seminary director, there is an entirely different dimension to Bonhoeffer's work. The years between 1933 and 1939 were concerned with preparing seminarians in their last year of training for the ministry. It was Bonhoeffer's duty to provide a model of the Christian life both in regard to the seminary discipline and study. As rector, "Bonhoeffer never laid down any

³⁹Bethge relates that "already at the time of completing his Nachfolge [The Cost of Discipleship (1937)] Bonhoeffer was planning a new approach to the problems of Christian Ethics." Ethics, p. 11.

⁴⁰The Way to Freedom, p. 233.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 247.

rules. He made up procedures as he went along and revised them as practice required...He confided to Pastor Bethge that he also distrusted theory in theology."⁴² As a pastor trying to describe the mentality of the believer, Bonhoeffer tended to demand the distinction of world and church which is not characteristic of either his earlier work or his contemporary ecumenical writings.

The Cost of Discipleship explained Bonhoeffer's experience at Finkenwald and the meaning that it had given the Christian life. This work is the clearest and longest effort of Bonhoeffer's middle period and shows the function of Revelation in the programming of one's behavior. Belief must make a difference in one's actions: grace is not cheap. Implicit in the "yes" of the believer is a "no" to the world as anything that hinders one's confession. Previously in his capacity as seminary director most of Bonhoeffer's writings were devotional or liturgical, e.g., "King David," "Temptation," Life Together and a "Prayerbook of the Bible." However, The Cost of Discipleship rose from the biblical study of the seminary's curriculum.⁴³ Its background is given by Bonhoeffer's report for 1936.

Lectures and exercises stand now, as ever, under the shadow of biblical work. After dealing with the "Discipleship

⁴²Metha, p. 157.

⁴³In a letter to Karl Barth on Sept. 19, 1936, Bonhoeffer explained the academic concerns of Finkenwalde. "The chief questions are those of the exposition of the Sermon on the Mount and the Pauline doctrine of justification and sanctification. I am engaged in a work [Cost of Discipleship] on the subject and I would have asked and learnt a very, very great deal from you." The Way to Freedom, p. 116.

of Christ" in the first course, the theme "The Visible Church" followed in the second, "The New Life in Paul" in the third and "Concrete Ethics in Paul" in the present semester...I believe that a certain climax has been reached with the present course. While I am writing this report, a two and a half day long disputation is going on, from morning to evening, on "The Preaching of the Law"...Our community is knit more closely together by this common work on a question which is so significant for our church today.⁴⁴

Bonhoeffer's themes of the "hiddenness of Christian life" or the "great divide" between the church and the world,⁴⁵ and his ecclesiastical theme during this time differ. However, the impression should not be taken that there is no continuity in the aspect of his thought. The themes of "deputyship" and the identification of the faithful and the ethical life are contained in Bonhoeffer's earliest dissertation⁴⁶ and have precedents within this second period as well.⁴⁷ The presentation of The Cost of Discipleship shows the Lutheran orthodoxy that was a constant factor in Bonhoeffer's writings.

Finkenwalde was closed in 1937, and the ever-increasing pressure of the Gestapo gradually eliminated even those substitute training centers that the Confessing Church established.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 125.

⁴⁵See the table of contents, Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, rev. and unabridged ed., trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), pp. 5-6.

⁴⁶Cf. Communion of Saints, p. 107.

⁴⁷In his essay "The Interpretation of the New Testament," No Rusty Swords, pp. 308-325, Bonhoeffer suggests a science of hermeneutics that if applied in the case of a concrete ethical decision, would constitute ethics as post factum biblical reference.

Bonhoeffer's operations were hampered at every turn; in 1936, he was restricted from lecturing at the university, in 1937, travel became difficult, and by 1939, his age group was about to be drafted for military service. Whereas Bonhoeffer's academic period was crowned with success, this second period ended in apparent failure with his doubt-filled resolve to leave Germany. When he returned in July of 1939, it was to a new mode of activity and a different expression of his thought.

Politics and Prison, 1939-1945

The last division of Bonhoeffer's life that will be considered is that of 1940 to his execution in 1945. The outlines of his ethical theory have been given in his academic period; the method and motive for his approach resulted from biblical emphasis and his experiences centering around the Finkenwalde Seminary. The attraction to ethics, evident in both periods, comes to fruition with the circumstances that Bonhoeffer faced in the last five years of his life.

By this time, ethics was seen as the conclusion of both his theological work and necessity of his lived experience. Eberhard Bethge who was Bonhoeffer's confessor during the time at Finkenwalde and confidant during the years in prison, says that

Already at the time of completing his Nachfolge [Cost of Discipleship (1937)] Bonhoeffer was planning a new approach to the problems of Christian ethics. He thought of this as the beginning of his actual life work. In June of 1939, he was invited by Professor John Baillie, on behalf of the Croall Lectureship Trust, to lecture

at Edinburgh, and he hoped to make his lectures the basis for his book. The war put an end to his preparations and he did not take up this work again until 1940.⁴⁸

Bonhoeffer was a careful thinker and he must have been aware of the divergent trends of his thought. In his first dissertation he studied the sociological-empirical forms of the church; in the Cost of Discipleship he devoted a whole chapter to the "Hidden Character of the Christian Life."⁴⁹ As an official of the Confessing Church he advocated involvement; as the pastor of Finkenwalde he demanded the separation of church and world. He writes glowing praise of Karl Barth and in the same letter confesses he is departing from his views.⁵⁰ The compulsion to write on ethics systematically was partially caused by the need to reconcile the many facets of his thought.

But the wish of the theologian for clarity and application⁵¹ was intensified by Bonhoeffer's duties in the resistance. He had

⁴⁸Ethics, p. 11.

⁴⁹The Cost of Discipleship, pp. 172-192.

⁵⁰The Way to Freedom, p. 116.

⁵¹While waiting to return to Germany from America in 1939, Bonhoeffer outlined in his diary the "outstanding problems of present continental theology" which he carried unresolved back to Germany. He lists: "1) Confession and damnation, 2) the Church, 3) the powers ordained by God, 4) Christian life, the meaning of suffering, 5) Church and Synod, 6) Christ and Antichrist, and 7) Christlike life." The Way to Freedom, p. 232. Such methodicalness is typical of Bonhoeffer's mind and shows the range of questions that went into the formulation of his Ethics.

returned to Germany just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Quickly, Bonhoeffer was forbidden to preach or publish; he was forced to relinquish all his duties regarding seminary training, and had to report regularly to the Berlin police. Politically, he was a marked man and Bonhoeffer responded in August of 1940 by joining those conspiring against Hitler's regime. He obtained a position in the Abwehr or Military Intelligence Office with the support of certain military opponents of Hitler, and began his tasks in the Counter-Espionage. Bonhoeffer was convinced now that his political convictions and religious belief could not be separated.

Although Bonhoeffer used his position to aid the Confessing Church, his main task was political. He used his ecumenical influence to seek the Allied governments' terms of surrender in the event that internal resistance could overthrow Hitler in May of 1942. By day he worked on Ethics and at night he met with the resistance. As a Christian he lied, stole and plotted the assassination of Hitler. This double life that Bonhoeffer led was a problem to his conscience, and indeed, made him suspect even in church circles. "When eventually he was imprisoned, his name did not appear on the intercession list of the confessing church."⁵²

Bonhoeffer's work in ethics--his conversations,⁵³ his

⁵²E. A. Robertson, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 11.

⁵³Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann speaks of Bonhoeffer's preoccupation with the ethical problems of marriage and the family in 1939, and with the question of Hitler's assassination in 1942. I Knew

fragmentary book, his essays⁵⁴ and letters while in prison-- should be seen as expressive of his vision of a "worldly Christianity." Ethics is his example of the "non-religious interpretation of theological concepts." Ethics was written to show the Christian how to accept the world "come of age"⁵⁵ in his behavior. Bonhoeffer's concern was to translate the will of God into human terms; to allow the divine commandments to function in moral deliberation. Bonhoeffer's ethical system has been called a "contextualist understanding of ethics,"⁵⁶ to indicate the importance of the temporal situation in moral problem-solving. This concrete ethic is demanded by Bonhoeffer's basic premise that the Gospel-as-preached is always self-evident in terms of its present meaning. Thus, Ethics has a style and approach that is different from earlier works even though they touch on the same subjects. The methodology of Ethics is not biblical exegesis--it is rather that fusion of fact and faith indicative of Bonhoeffer's life.

Bonhoeffer's life and theology are indispensable for

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 190. Oskar Hammelsbeck speaks of their discussions on Natural Law. Ibid., p. 186.

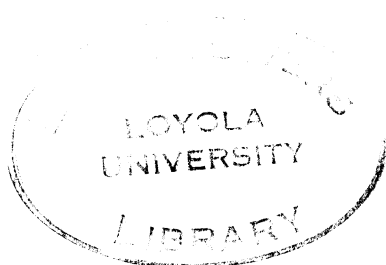
⁵⁴"The First Table of the Ten Commandments," in John D. Godsey, A Preface to Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965) pp. 50-67.

⁵⁵The phrases in parentheses are taken from the letter of June 8, 1944, addressed to Eberhard Bethge. Letters and Papers, pp. 194-200.

⁵⁶Alvin C. Porteous (ed.), Prophetic Voices in Contemporary Theology (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 168.

understanding his ethic. As his life becomes more "secular," his theology evolves to liberate the Christian for the world. Ethics is the surest indication of this theological tendency. "All the earlier works: the sociology of the Church, the methodology of theology, the biblical concern for discipleship, the disciplines of devotion--all these pointed to the Ethics."⁵⁷

However, Bonhoeffer's theological premises were a foundation that remained throughout his life. He began from principles that were limits to his thought in spite of his changing circumstances and attention. These principles are the ground for the continuity that is evident in his thought. Once the starting points are established, one thinks as he must in order to be consistent. It is precisely these preconceptions, the premises implicit and explicit in Bonhoeffer's work that must now be considered.



⁵⁷Martin E. Marty (ed.), The Place of Bonhoeffer (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 197.

CHAPTER II

THE RELATION OF THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY IN BONHOEFFER'S ETHICS

The terminology that Bonhoeffer uses is basically theological. An historical approach regarding his theology is necessary in order to comprehend the intention and significance of his concepts. Seen from the perspective of Bonhoeffer's life, his theology develops to its central enterprise in Ethics. This is the major work of that period in which Bonhoeffer attempted to give faith a non-theological language and show the worldly stance of Christianity. Events developed in such a way that the scholarly, dogmatic theologian was compelled by Christian responsibility to assume the role of the counter-spy, plotting the defeat of Hitler. Consequently, Bonhoeffer's ethics is a conscious attempt to give the world, the natural and the rational, a place in his theology equal to that status it had in his everyday life.

Ethics is the result of this intention and the clearest summary of Bonhoeffer's moral theory. Many terms and expressions in his ethical work, therefore, have a secular quality that is not present in his dogmatic theology. However, the vocabulary of Ethics is not an innovation that lacks continuity with Bonhoeffer's early writings. The non-biblical language of Bonhoeffer's moral

theory is a development consistent with his correlation of theology and philosophy.

Dualism in Thought

Theology is a perspective on reality and implies a notion of truth which must be expressed in words. Inherent in Bonhoeffer's notion of Christology, the heart of his theology, is a conception of the relationship between faith and reason. Bonhoeffer's ethics is one instance of his attempt to show the falseness of any dichotomy between these two spheres. To him, the meaning of the Incarnation is the unity of all things "in Christ." Bonhoeffer's theology attempts to conceptualize this Christic synthesis. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the basis of the correlation between theology and philosophy established in the development of Bonhoeffer's ethical system and to see its application in at least one area--that of anthropology.

Bonhoeffer is a dialectical theologian. Method alone, commits him to the synthesis of diverse elements within his theology. Thus, he is very critical of attempts to establish ontic boundaries between the different domains of life. The antithesis of church and state, of supernatural and natural, of faith and reason is that type of dual thinking which could tolerate the political tyranny of Hitler and cripple the usefulness of the Confessing Church. The history of this dualism of thought and being in Christian ethics is portrayed by Bonhoeffer and

distinguished from his own position.

Since the beginnings of Christian ethics after the times of the New Testament the main underlying conception in ethical thought and the one which consciously or unconsciously has determined its whole course, has been the conception of a juxtaposition and conflict of two spheres, the one divine, holy, supernatural and Christian, and the other worldly, profane, natural and un-Christian. This view becomes dominant for the first time in the Middle Ages, and for the second time in the pseudo-Protestant thought of the period after the Reformation. Reality as a whole now falls into two parts, and the concern of ethics is the proper relation of these two parts to each other.¹

This trait of previous Christian ethical systems becomes a point of departure for Bonhoeffer. Such a conception is "theologically speaking, to think in terms of laws,"² while Bonhoeffer hopes to free the Christian from rules and principles for God's service. If ethics is split between "ought" and "is," between knowledge of good and evil, and between motives or consequences as the determinants of the good, then ethics has separated reality and replaced its unity with a principle or a law of affinity. In Christ, creation already has been reconciled. From Bonhoeffer's earliest address on ethics, he opposes any attempt to replace Christ's mediation with static norms.

We will speak today of the basic questions raised by the demand for a Christian ethic, not by making the attempt to lay down generally valid, Christian norms and precepts in contemporary ethical questions--which in any case is completely hopeless--but rather by examining and entering into the characteristic trend of contemporary ethical problems in light of fundamental Christian ideas. The reason for a limitation of this nature lies in the fact,

¹Ethics, p. 196.

²Ibid., p. 199.

that there are not and cannot³ be Christian norms and principles of a moral nature.

The reason for such distrust of principles and absolutes in ethics is partly due to the moral flexibility required by the ecclesiastical struggle within Germany. Partly, the rejection of universal norms stems from their inadequacy in Bonhoeffer's experience. In both respects the attempt to structure behavior or determine the right course of action according to a priori norms only resulted in the indecision and mental paralysis of conflicting claims. Even if the norms were so-called "Christian" norms an obstructive deliberation about biblical interpretation and contradictory commandments resulted. The conscience operating on principles is a labyrinth of motives and consequences; it indicates a radical disunity in thought. The fundamental reason for the insufficiency of universal precepts of morality is that they claim, implicitly, to grasp the eternal and infinite will of God. In effect, absolute directives and regulations split reality into the good and the bad and define the relationship between them. This legalizes the will of God in the manner of the Pharisees⁴ and every such attempt ends with enslavement to the Law. "Ethical thinking in terms of the spheres then, is invalidated by the faith in the revelation of the ultimate reality in Jesus Christ."⁵

³"What is a Christian Ethic?" No Rusty Swords, p. 40.

⁴"The Pharisee," Ethics, pp. 26-37.

⁵Ethics, p. 200.

Besides the wish to avoid a dualism, Bonhoeffer's interest in the relationship of theology and philosophy follows upon the necessity of knowing and communicating the gospel.

In ethics, as in dogmatics, we cannot simply reproduce the terminology of the Bible. The altered problems of ethics demand an altered terminology. But it must be remembered that an extension of the terminology involves the risk of slipping away from what is essential.⁶

Bonhoeffer is aware that Christianity must be thought before it can be communicated. This requires an epistemology of faith. Such need is realized even when criticizing theologians for their philosophical usages, e.g., Tillich for his Existentialism⁷ or Barth for his Kantianism.⁸

Bonhoeffer's second dissertation, Act and Being, is a major attempt to relate theology and philosophy because of the needs of terminology. The central problem is "one of forming genuine theological concepts and choosing whether one is to use ontological categories in explaining them or those of transcendental philosophy."⁹ The tentative conclusions of Act and Being provide a context for the eventual definitions of theology and philosophy that Bonhoeffer proposed.

The Definition of Theology and Philosophy

"Theology is a function of the Church...theology is the

⁶Ibid., p. 223.

⁷"Man in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology," No Rusty Swords, pp. 58-60.

⁸Letters and Papers, p. 198.

⁹Act and Being, p. 12.

memory of the Church."¹⁰ It is "reflective knowledge in the service of the Church."¹¹ Theology is once removed from that Actus Directus¹² which is the cognitive act of belief and which is divinely effected. Theology's function is to clarify the transcendental revelation while realizing that it never grasps this act by its reflection. This inability of the mind to conceptualize the pure revelation of God is emphatic in the case of philosophy. "Per se, a philosophy cannot spare room for revelation."¹³ Systematic philosophy attempts to grasp total reality but fails to do so because human nature has no potential, no capacity for this divine act. Reason is limited by that which is incomprehensible, i.e., God. Therefore the ground of reality is excluded from cognition. Critical philosophy attempts to limit reason by reason which only reasserts its essential ego-centricity. The method of both theology and philosophy is reflective analysis, but the former proceeds "from the truth," while the latter moves "to the truth."

"Christian theology has to be conscious of its particular premise, that is, the premise of the reality of God."¹⁴ Philosophy, on the other hand, begins with the attempt to prove the

¹⁰Ibid., p. 143.

¹¹Ibid., p. 150.

¹²Ibid., pp. 181f.

¹³Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Christian Idea of God," Journal of Religion, XII, 2 (April, 1932), p. 177.

existence of God. Methods may be similar but these methods begin at radically different starting points. Theology starts with God, while philosophy attempts to reach Him by its inevitable presupposition that thought can find the truth and thus find God. Theology scientifically considers the category of revelation and subjectively presupposes the state of faith. Because theology has a place for God, it is the critique of all philosophy, which is inescapably restricted to the mental forms and incapable of the infinite. Theology, beginning with God-given knowledge can conclude that "no religion, no ethics, no metaphysical knowledge may serve to approach God. They are all under the judgment of God, they are the works of man."¹⁵

Philosophy clarifies the modes of reflection, and, as such, it is useful to theology. Moreover, in accepting a systematization of concepts a theologian inevitably associates himself with some philosophy. However, Bonhoeffer holds that even in its capacity of linguistic analysis, philosophy "cannot be understood without a theological background and therefore cannot provide any axiomatic interpretation of the theological...."¹⁶ Ultimately, philosophical modes of thought are based on theological insights, while theology has data that evaluates all systematic thought as curvum in se, corruptio mentis.¹⁷ Thus, the relation of Chris-

¹⁵Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁶No Rusty Swords, p. 98.

¹⁷"Self centered, the corruption of the mind." No Rusty Swords, p. 370.

tian theology to philosophy is not static or determined; it is not the case that one specific philosophical terminology is necessary for the statement of revelation. Theology begins with divine knowledge, i.e., revelation as one instance of truth that is imposed, free and objective. The theologian can utilize any philosophy that is humble and obedient to this intuition of faith.

The question of the proper mode of theological expression can be restated as: Is there a Christian philosophy? Bonhoeffer would answer that whatever philosophy is not closed to revelation is Christian. The only restriction on philosophical systems is that they be critical, that they recognize their ineptness beside the divine reality and make no claim to the final word on truth.

The discussion on the relationship of theology and philosophy has centered on epistemology. Bonhoeffer's opinion is that both theology and philosophy affirm reality as their proper object, and the mode of knowing for each is systematic. However, the theory of knowledge that theology develops is consciously open to God while philosophy necessarily excludes the infinite God. Bonhoeffer develops this character of theological cognition by considering its three-fold reception of revelation.

In understanding this [revelation] we first need to distinguish between three ways of knowing...knowing as a believer, knowing in preaching, and theological knowledge, of which the first may be called existential and the others ecclesiastical cognition.¹⁸

¹⁸ Act and Being, p. 137.

Existential knowing is never captured in reflection; it is the intuition of the person of Christ and is a divine gift. If rationality grasps the divine reality, then ethics becomes a way from man to God; the mediation of the Word of God and the fact of grace would be superfluous. "Thought, even theological thought will always be systematic by nature and can therefore never comprehend the living person of Christ."¹⁹ And yet ecclesiastical knowledge is different from philosophical modes of thought because "there is obedient thinking and there is disobedient thinking."²⁰ Theology, therefore, entails a posteriori forms of knowing while those of philosophy are "disobedient" because they are a priori.

Although not as pronounced as the epistemological discussion on theology and philosophy, there is a definite metaphysical position underlying Bonhoeffer's correlation. Bonhoeffer means to use an ontological as well as cognitive analysis of theology and philosophy. One facet of Bonhoeffer's theology is concerned with the possibilities of Natural Theology, that philosophical discipline which most closely approximates theological study. Bonhoeffer denies the existence of a rational approach to God, not only because it is a hopeless attempt to comprehend the Infinite, but because there is no chain of being that will support this analogia entis. God cannot be an object of philosophi-

¹⁹Ibid., p. 146.

²⁰Idem.

cal thought because He has no metaphysical relationship to creation. "Creator and creature cannot be said to have a relation of cause and effect, for between Creator and creature there is neither a law of motive nor a law of effect nor anything else. Between Creator and creature there is simply nothing: the void."²¹

It is impossible to speak of teleology or causality in this fallen world as either a cognitive or metaphysical approach to God, because only the will of God incarnate in the Son of God can effect such an approach. Bonhoeffer proposes an "analogy of relationship" and the "orders of Preservation" since the natural structures of thought and being "have no value in themselves. They are accomplished and have purpose only through Christ."²² Thus, Bonhoeffer excludes philosophy from certain subject matter, i.e., an Infinite Being, for reasons that will be seen to have consequences within his ethics.

It is evident that ultimately the question of the relation of theology and philosophy is one of Christology. In the final analysis both stand on the judgment of God. Any definition that might oppose these modes of reflection is indicative of dualistic thinking or thought in terms of two spheres. Even though the character of theology is revelational while philosophy is rational, Bonhoeffer maintains that "The 'supernatural' is only in the

²¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall: Temptation, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. John E. Fletcher and Kathleen Downham (New York: Macmillan Co., 1959), p. 18.

²²Ibid., p. 88.

natural, the holy only in the profane, and the revelational only in the rational."²³ Christ is the unity that draws all seeming opposites together. Theology and philosophy are not identical, but both realize their truth and being only as facets of the "new creation" in Christ. Note that Bonhoeffer justifies his definition of these two disciplines by an appeal to faith; his formulation of ethics will be sustained by a similar appeal.

The autonomy and isolation of reason is Bonhoeffer's philosophical objection to an independent science of philosophy.

"This fact of the captivity of human thinking within itself, that is to say, of its inevitable autocracy and self glorification as it is found in philosophy, can be interpreted theologically as the corruption of the mind, which is caused by the first Fall."²⁴ The state of man's mind only demonstrates the ontological condition of man in statu corruptionis. Theology begins with revelation, and so it can grasp the impact of the Original Sin and the Redemption on human nature, just as it realizes the difference between actus reflectus and actus directus in the mind. "Because our existence is not in unity our thinking is torn apart as well."²⁵

Anthropology

If one is to question either man himself or the works of man

²³Ethics, p. 198.

²⁴"The Christian Idea of God," p. 178.

²⁵Creation and Fall, p. 57.

such as theology and philosophy, with ultimate seriousness, he must inquire before God. Every attempt of reason is limited to its own structures and therefore every philosophical anthropology defines the nature of man simply by the manner in which it asks its questions. If man attempts to know himself from his possibilities or his limitations, the two alternatives open to rational psychology, he cannot escape the fact that he is a part of the question. In Bonhoeffer's mind, the attempt by philosophy to define human nature is the futile attempt of thought to transcend thought, and of man to transcend himself by objectifying himself. "Philosophy, therefore, means the question of man and its answer all in one,"²⁶ since it is man's effort, figuratively, to lift himself by his bootstraps.

The philosophical problem of man has developed from the experience of his achievements and limits. This polarity is an abstraction from that theological understanding which begins from the pervasive unity of Christ the God-man. To Bonhoeffer, any essential definition to man that does not account for his intentional relationship to God is an instance of the splitting of reality into two dimensions. "Nothing can be known of either God or man before God has become man in Jesus Christ."²⁷ Thus, it is in Christ that humanity finds its proper proportion.

²⁶No Rusty Swords, p. 51..

²⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ The Center, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 105.

The primordial sin changed man's nature because it changed God's relationship to man. Original Sin disunified human nature and severed it from its origin and destiny. In this corrupted state, man's essence is sin.²⁸ On the other hand, Redemption is a new creation, and re-establishes the truth of human nature as creaturehood. The man of faith has a new nature. In short, "The being of man has no formal, metaphysical, psychological properties dissociable from the proposition that 'man is either in Christ or in Adam'."²⁹

The theological anthropology thus advocated by Bonhoeffer is based on biblical, Lutheran insights. This conception of human nature is consistent with his rejection of any duality in reality and his correlation of theology and philosophy. Grace and sin are ontological categories to Bonhoeffer and form the ground for the Christian concept of man's being. Faith gives evidence which interprets and harmonizes all other evidence concerning cosmology, epistemology and anthropology. The absolute and unrestricted will of God constitutes all nature by its free acceptance or rejection. With this voluntaristic conception of God³⁰ "all

²⁸"'In Adam' means in untruth, in culpable perversion of the will (the human essence) inwards to the self--cor curvum in se." Act and Being, p. 156.

²⁹Ibid., p. 148.

³⁰It is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss this voluntaristic notion of God except for its importance as a presupposition of much of Bonhoeffer's work on the correlation of theology and philosophy. This assertion may be verified in Creation and Fall, pp. 38-39, and No Rusty Swords, p. 46. In The Communion of Saints, p. 31, Bonhoeffer criticizes Idealism's

metaphysical ideas of eternity and time, being and becoming, living and dying, essence and appearance must be compatible."³¹ Thus, man's being is determined by its unity with or separation from the plan of God as "being-in-Christ" or "being-in-Adam."

It should be recognized that Bonhoeffer's understanding of the will of God as contained in the person of Christ is fundamental to his conception of the nature of man and the ethical dimensions of that nature. Neither nature nor any operation of nature has any ontological status or value in se. The unconditioned, unmotivated freedom of God is Bonhoeffer's premise in reconciling the two spheres. It is a necessary premise for making faith prior to the fruitful and proper use of reason and for denying a doctrine of analogy³² that would give human nature an intrinsic goodness. If man is conceived to have some independent inherent teleology, or if human actions can be categorized as objectively good or bad, then the will of God has been restricted and determined. Bonhoeffer objects to any general theory of being which denies the contingency of God's revelation or establishes a human reality that is independent of God's eternally new decision. Such conceptions would deny the freedom of God.

In his discussion of the relation of theology and philosophy

ethics and anthropology for having "no voluntarist concept of God." It is the will of God that imposes obligations upon man and constitutes the truth value of human reason rather than some ontological structure.

³¹Act and Being, p. 172.

³²Ibid., pp. 68-69.

Bonhoeffer opts for a Christian use of reason. Therefore, when he discusses the nature of man, Bonhoeffer proposes a theological anthropology. Both of these assumptions are the result of what Bonhoeffer considers to be the Christian idea of God. Man is what the infinite and transcendent God now wants him to be. The Christian concept of the person is man-after-the-Fall, and is the only notion which is consistent with the "absolute distinction between God and man."³³ The moment of faith is regarded as the revelation of this absolute difference. Belief establishes man's being as being "in Christ" and becomes the central reference point for Bonhoeffer's ethics. Belief recovers the unity of man with his origin and destiny and therefore Christian ethics can speak to the whole man. An ethic based on this anthropology, furthermore, intends not to call man to some ideal or "other-worldliness" but to be truly human.

By asserting the void between Creator and creature, Bonhoeffer means to confirm their unity and reconciliation in the life of Christ. The final "oneness" of reality in the Incarnation has a crucial function for Bonhoeffer's ethical purposes. A system that opposes faith and reason by constructing an ethic of pietism or formalism is clearly invalid. The irresponsibility engendered by thinking in terms of two dimensions and universal principles is overcome. In this framework, deputyship cannot end at some artificial boundary. Furthermore, if the proper

³³The Communion of Saints, p. 31.

being of man is "in Christ," there is an anthropological basis for both faith and reason to provide ethical direction as well as a foundation for non-biblical terminology in Christian ethics.

In summary, Bonhoeffer was a theologian whose idea of God prompted him to assert an infinite gap between God and the world. On the other hand, Bonhoeffer's concept of the Word of God committed him to reconcile all in Christ. He maintained a "polemic unity"³⁴ between thought open to grace (theology) and thought closed to grace (philosophy); just as there is a polemic unity of being-in-Christ and being-in-Adam. However, it is important to realize that the point of unity is given by faith. Only belief in Christ specifies the proper use of philosophy; only faith shows the true nature of man. There could be no science of morality independent of the data of Revelation. It remains to be seen what real significance that reason or non-biblical evidence can have within Bonhoeffer's ethic. The relationship between theology and philosophy, between the supernatural and the natural, is not one of equals. Reason seems to be dependent and subjugated to faith. It is necessary therefore, to investigate very closely the attempts of Bonhoeffer to account for the rational and the natural within his ethics. It remains a question whether the tension felt within the theoretical foundations of Bonhoeffer's relationship of theology and philosophy will occur in the practice of his Ethics.

³⁴Ethics, p. 199.

CHAPTER III

THE DISTINCTION OF PENULTIMATE-ULTIMATE IN BONHOEFFER'S ETHIC

Bonhoeffer spoke in terms of the penultimate-ultimate distinction when he attempted to specify the place of reason in ethics. In Bonhoeffer's view, faith was not opposed to reason. Rather, the unity of all life's dimensions in Christ prompted Bonhoeffer to analyse the exact relationship between the insights given by Revelation and those given by rational deliberation. He hoped to revitalize the concept of the "natural" within Lutheran moral theology by the categories of the penultimate and the ultimate. These same categories make the temporal situation essential to the consideration of moral behavior. In effect, the penultimate-ultimate distinction attempts to conciliate a natural law theory and a situation ethic.

In the preceding analysis of Bonhoeffer's relation of faith and reason, and his exposition of human nature, the premises of his Christian ethics were given. Bonhoeffer insists upon the foundation of Christology but equally upon the affinity of Christianity and humanism. It is only by faith that man attains the ultimate perspective that makes his activity ethically significant. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to see the concrete

ethical program proposed by Bonhoeffer on the basis of these hypotheses. The definition and meaning of the "ethical," the place of faith in moral discourse and, finally, the attempt of Bonhoeffer to make the natural orders ethically relevant will be the order of study.

The Problem of Ethics

It is important to understand the problems that Bonhoeffer hoped to alleviate with his ethical proposals. The problem usually determines the character of the remedy. The estimation of Bonhoeffer's achievements in Ethics is vitally connected with the difficulties that he considered in its formulation. The positive and negative elements which are organized into Bonhoeffer's definition of ethics are pivotal to any interior criticism, as they are the criteria he himself sets for the evaluation of his ethics.

A theological foundation for ethics was a progressive concern within the wider development of Bonhoeffer's theology. His aim of showing the concrete nature of revelation logically concluded with the study of morality. Thus, there is a strictly theological purpose to Ethics. "The problem of Christian ethics is the realization among God's creatures of the revelational reality of God in Christ, just as the problem of dogmatics is the truth of the revelational reality of God in Christ."¹ In this sense, Ethics is Bonhoeffer's attempt to summarize his thought

¹Ethics, p. 190.

by drawing the conclusions and implications of his initial positions on the nature of the Church and Christology.

Moreover, the Lutheran concern with the relationship of Gospel and Law--the dogma of justification by faith--was another theoretical problem. The study during the Finkenwalde period had not resolved the exegetic difficulties of the significance of the commandments and ethical directives in the gospel. Law is enigmatic since Christ proclaimed the Christian's freedom from the law. The nature of a Christian commandment needed exposition if faith and not works was to be the criterion of salvation.

Besides these methodological aims, Bonhoeffer's experience convinced him of the failure of previous ethics. Not the absence but the abundance of ethical systems contributed to the moral confusion of the era of the Great Depression and the two World Wars. The problematic was evident to him in the success of Hitler and the advent of the Third Reich. The ethical attitudes which history proved to be ineffective also contributed to Bonhoeffer's positive hopes for his ethics. The ethical systems that attempted to handle Nazism were like "rusty swords."² Bonhoeffer compares them to the figure of Don Quixote, dressed in ridiculous armour and fighting for a non-existent lady. On two occasions³ Bonhoeffer itemized the ethical systems that history had tested and broken. Rationalism is too idealistic to have a

²Ibid., p. 68.

³Letters and Papers, pp. 17-19, and Ethics, pp. 65-67.

concrete effect on the world. Moral fanaticism is more concerned with virtue than the conditions which make it possible and so is entangled in non-essentials. Devotion to conscience results in indecision and ineffectiveness. Duty ends in avoiding responsibility and a slavish imitation of the past. If freedom is one's sole ethical principle it becomes self-assertion since it is an immature criterion of choosing among alternatives. In essence, each of these attitudes is imitation of the Law, and confines ethics to the limits of some principle. The history of ethical theory, therefore, is a negative factor contributing to Bonhoeffer's purposes in moral theology. Bonhoeffer, however, sees the need for the gospel in liberating man for a creative encounter with changing circumstances.

These theoretical and practical difficulties with ethics should be considered in the light of Bonhoeffer's aim of reconciling all the facets of life into the reality of Christ. He is stating his goals and expectations when he says that "after Christ, Ethics can have but one purpose, namely, the achievement of participation in the reality of the fulfilled will of God."⁴ Ethics, then, is that science which determines the way that "the present is taken up by God in Christ."⁵

Conformation

Bonhoeffer's notion of the problems with past ethical

⁴Ethics, p. 212.

⁵Ibid., p. 69.

theories is explanatory of the means he formulated to overcome them. Central to his technique is the concept of "conformation." Conformation is the goal of morality. Reality has a structure and so do ethical systems; the Christian structure is Christ. But conformation should not be understood as a pietistic "being like Christ" but rather it is that inner transformation that actually accomplishes the immediate mind and work of Christ. Just as Bonhoeffer objects to an ethic of universal principles, he opposes any attempt to make the gospel a new law or norm to impose arbitrarily upon the changing world. Christian ethics is a formative process which realizes the shape of Christ in today's world. Conformation is not a process that subjugates all the natural forms of life, but rather accepts them all within the teleology of Christ. As an ethical term, conformation is that style of human life which is most truly human and whose expression is the most adequate to all the dimensions of reality. Bonhoeffer's theory of conformation attempts to specify the ethical function of faith.

Conformation is the program that combines simplicity and wisdom, and by so doing replaces the ineffective ethics of the past. Simplicity is that being-in-Christ which was mentioned as the anthropological basis of Bonhoeffer's ethics. It is that single-mindedness that searches only the will of God for guidance. Because the simple man "looks only to God, without any sidelong glance at the world, he is able to look at the reality of the world freely and without prejudice. And that is how simplicity

becomes wisdom."⁶ Conformation is effected by the harmony of both the divine and the natural in human behavior.

The divine effectiveness in conformation is expressed by Bonhoeffer's sections on the commandments. The commandment of God is the object of Christian ethics,⁷ because it is the foundation of the "ethical." It is the light of permission that cuts through the dark motives and desires of the conscience. It must not be fragmented into various ethical directions but be realized as "the permission to live as man before God. The commandment of God is permission. It differs from all human laws in that it commands freedom."⁸ Moreover, the fact of the divine commandment establishes forms of superiority and inferiority all through life. This structure is the warrant or authority for any ethical discussion.

Conformation as based on the command of Christ demonstrates Bonhoeffer's requirement for a social perspective in ethics. Ethics is not written by or for the isolated individual struggling alone with his decisions. There is no ethical behavior in isolation. The locus of conformation in Christ is a visible community.

Ethics as formation is possible only upon the foundation of the form of Jesus Christ which is present in His Church. The Church is the place where Jesus Christ's

⁶Ibid., p. 68.

⁷Ibid., p. 277.

⁸Ibid., p. 281.

taking form is proclaimed and accomplished. It is this proclamation and this event that Christian ethics is designed to serve.⁹

The ethical choice is never secluded since it takes shape in a situation that is essentially social by revelational precept.

When explaining the meaning of conformation, Bonhoeffer shows that his theory is a type of "situation ethic." "Ethical problems of content can never be discussed in a Christian light; there is simply no possibility of erecting generally valid principles, because each moment lived in God's sight, can bring an unexpected decision."¹⁰ A timeless, placeless ethic is adolescent; the splitting of human possibilities into good and bad is immature. Any system that gives general validity to moral principles does not realize the infinite variation of the form of Christ's commandment in history. The respect for each situation which denies a systematic knowledge of right and wrong is evident in The Cost of Discipleship and its attempt to explicate the Sermon on the Mount. The life of discipleship forbids an abstract ethic but requires obedience in the concrete situation. "To follow in his steps is something that is void of all content. It gives us no intelligible programme for a way of life, no goal or ideal to strive after."¹¹ The configuration with Christ is not an alien mold, shaping man according to this ideal or that end,

⁹Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁰"What is a Christian Ethic?", No Rusty Swords, p. 46.

¹¹Cost of Discipleship, p. 62.

but is the real form of man in history.

"Responsibility" is the human element in conformation; it is the human acceptance and accomplishment of God's will. Responsibility is that freedom which refuses to hide behind principles, or authorize one's behavior by anything other than one's personal judgment. The responsible person knows ethical success in the risk of action and not in intense deliberation. "Responsibility is the total and realistic response to the claim of God and of our neighbor,...it shows in its true light how the response of a conscience which is bound by principles is only a partial one."¹² Responsibility realizes the freedom of obedience to the form of Christ, and accepts only the genuine obligations of divine mandate and human need. Conscience is an isolating factor, and incapacitates man with norms and rules. However, man's conscience is freed and unified by simplicity and wisdom when it is informed by Christ. The responsible man willingly incurs the guilt resulting from the law broken in response to Christian values. Final judgment on motives or consequences is not given by an individual's sense of righteousness. "The man who acts in the freedom of his own most personal responsibility is precisely the man who sees his action finally committed to the guidance of God."¹³ This is the meaning of Luther's dictum to sin boldly, but believe more boldly.

¹²Ethics, p. 245.

¹³Ibid., p. 249.

Bonhoeffer gives an example of the contextual and social character of conformation in his chapter on "What is meant by 'Telling the Truth?'"¹⁴ Truth is different in different situations; the truth value of a statement depends on the relationship, place, context, subject matter, etc., in which it occurs. The truth between a parent and a child is often a lie outside of the family. Telling the truth is not just a matter of moral character or conscience; it cannot be defined as the correspondence of the mental and verbal. Absolute factual statement often can be cynical and cruel whereas the truth is "also a matter of correct appreciation of real situations and of serious reflection upon them."¹⁵

The responsibility to tell the truth cannot be defined outside of the interpersonal situation that demands it. Objective structures of the lower and the higher are sociological fact. This framework of natural hierarchies is justified by divine command, and accepted in the manifold personal relationships of authority and obedience as the ethical domain. "The ethical is not essentially a formal, rational principle but a concrete relation between the giver and the receiver of commands."¹⁶ Therefore, truth is required and specified by the authority preserved in the order of nature from its corresponding subordinate.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 363-372.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 364.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 273.

Furthermore, the warrant or authorization for all ethical discussion depends upon the existence of an "office" or a polarity of authority and obedience in society. The truth value of a statement depends not only upon "what" is said but upon "who" says it.

Bonhoeffer's theory of conformation makes the situation a relevant factor in moral considerations. However, it would be a misunderstanding of Bonhoeffer's doctrine to think that the context signifies the subjective and radically particular quality of each moral choice.¹⁷ Rather, the situation is an objective factor in ethical decisions and can be sociologically analysed. The "situation" of ethical discussion is always the concrete form of human life which is established by divine decree. The relationships intrinsic to the natural life are those forms or communal structures which state the place and location of man's rights and duties. The ethical demands relationships of superiority and inferiority, of rights and obligations, of freedom and obedience. The natural world contains divinely commissioned orders that correlate permission and prohibition and provide the warrant for ethical discourse in these areas. These authority-obedience forms are called "mandates" by Bonhoeffer, and they specify the situational aspects of conformation.

¹⁷ Joseph Fletcher criticises Bonhoeffer for legalism and casuistry which is contrary to the "situational" character of Ethics. Cf. Situation Ethics: The New Morality (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 38. Fletcher has simply not understood the dogmatic sociology implied by Bonhoeffer's meaning of the term "context" or "situation."

This relativeness of the world to Christ assumes concrete form in certain mandates of God in the world. The Scripture names four such mandates: labour, marriage, government and the church.¹⁸ We speak of the divine mandates rather than of divine orders because the word mandate refers more clearly to a divinely imposed task rather than to a determination of being. It is God's will that there shall be labour, marriage, government and church in the world.¹⁹

God's commandment--the basis of all right and duty because it is the basis of man's relationship to God--confronts man in four different but unified forms. These mandates are the commission that gives the Christian freedom, since obedience in the context of labour, marriage, government and the church establish a concrete relationship to the Transcendent. The dynamism and vitality of the mandates when regarded as tasks instead of as metaphysical determinations or orders, locate man's ethical responsibilities. The mandates express "the reality of the love of God for the world and for men."²⁰ The function of the mandates is Bonhoeffer's most concrete effort to block any "Christian" retreat from the secular.

The structure of the responsible life--its correspondence with reality, freedom, social awareness, willingness to accept guilt and obedience--is the many-sided attitude of the Christian to his vocation of conformation with Christ as received in baptism.

¹⁸Bonhoeffer is slightly inconsistent in his specification of the mandates. A later consideration in Ethics lists them as the church, marriage, culture and government. (p. 286f.)

¹⁹Ethics, p. 207.

²⁰Ibid., p. 288.

To the individual, the orders of this world are a responsibility; to Christ's view, they are a calling. One's vocation is that place where deputyship is exercised, where God's commandment is heard. The notion of conformation reconciles these different areas of activity commanded in Christ and accomplished in responsibility. Conformation is the end of ethics; the mandates are the Christian's means for formation in Christ. Bonhoeffer's ethical program, then, opens the door to content,²¹ i.e., natural values.

The Ultimate and Penultimate

Formalism, as an ethical approach, was susceptible to the disjunction of intention and execution. Bonhoeffer rejected this position that good intentions alone make a person moral. Formalism had been used by Christians to justify their avoidance of the political questions of the Third Reich. In fact, formalism led Karl Barth to a "position of revelation."²² Bonhoeffer's concept of conformation, however, includes an experiential and theological effort to account for the world and express this concern in non-biblical language. The form of Christ is specified by the Christic structure of life. Thus, Bonhoeffer's most concrete

²¹The denial of content for Christian ethics that Bonhoeffer requested in his Barcelona lecture (Supra, p. 55f.) was modified by the time Ethics was written. His objections to Kantian formalism and his growing desire to concretize revelation are operative in the specific precepts contained in his final work on ethics.

²²Letters and Papers, p. 198.

proposals for a new ethic are centered upon his attempt to incorporate the preserved orders of the natural world into moral discussions. "One of his distinctive contributions to theological-ethical terminology is the paired concepts of the 'ultimate' and the 'penultimate'."²³

The ultimate--faith and divine justification--may not obliterate the penultimate or those conditions that are the sine qua non of belief. The ultimate or conformation is the end of ethical behavior while the penultimate is the means. The form of Christ is achieved only within the natural and the rational. Faith is never realized except in and through the historical and material preamble. The Lutheran doctrine of the justification of the sinner by faith alone--this is the last word, the ultimate of Christian life. However, "the Christian life means neither a destruction nor a sanctioning of the penultimate. In Christ the reality of God meets the reality of the world and allows us to share in this real encounter."²⁴

The relationship and nature of the penultimate as regards the ultimate is crucial to the understanding of one of Bonhoeffer's aims. He wishes to put content and circumstance into ethics and open morality to the Christian appreciation of the world. As is consistent with Bonhoeffer's Christology and dialectical

²³Franklin Eugene Sherman, "The Problem of a 'Trinitarian Social Ethic'" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation; Dept. of Theology, University of Chicago), p. 142.

²⁴Ethics, p. 133.

method, the point of intersection is the reality of Christ who loved the fallen world and re-directed it towards the unity of the divine volition.

The penultimate is not a state or condition in itself, but it is a judgment which the ultimate passes upon that which has preceded it. Concretely, two things are called penultimate in relation to the justification of the sinner by grace, namely, being man and being good... For the sake of the ultimate the penultimate must be preserved. Any arbitrary destruction of the penultimate will do serious injury to the ultimate.²⁵

In considering this relationship it is helpful to remember Bonhoeffer's previous study of the relation of ends and means in The Cost of Discipleship. He advised that ends should always be the summation and total of their constitutive elements. A conclusion is reached only through the necessary process of premise and reasoning. A statement's truth depends on the data that precedes it. A declaration, for instance, that man knows nothing, is valid only if it is the "answer to a sum," and "the outcome of long experience."²⁶ Only a life of diligent study can lead to such a declaration. When such an assertion is made by a college freshman to excuse academic laziness, the conclusion becomes a premise, breaking the necessary sequence of ends to means. Without the proper warrant, a directive invalidates itself. Thus, the ultimate is what it is, the last word, only if it is preceded by the penultimate.

To make the function of the penultimate relevant within

²⁵Ibid., pp. 133-34.

²⁶Cost of Discipleship, p. 55.

Christian ethics and to realize its importance as an ethical criterion, Bonhoeffer introduced the concept of the "natural" into Protestant ethics. The natural gives shape to the penultimate. The natural is "the form of life preserved by God for the fallen world and directed towards justification, redemption and renewal through Christ. The natural is, therefore, determined according to its form and according to its contents."²⁷ In other words, the natural is not the antithesis of the supernatural. This would split reality into two forms. The natural should be contrasted to the unnatural which is that chaotic element in the fallen world which opposes Christian direction. The natural is the form immanent to life and is an end and a means; it suggests active participation in the orders of preservation and creaturehood. As an end, the natural has inherent rights; as a means it has duties imposed upon it.

Before considering the rights and obligations of the natural, however, it is necessary to determine the extent of man's knowledge of the natural. Does human reason comprehend the orders of preservation? In effect, the natural is the human knowing of the "things before the last" or the penultimate. Reason is man's recognition of the penultimate as natural; it is the form of consciousness which corresponds to the form of being of the preserved world. Reason also is fallen and as an order of the natural has no privileged or essential grasp of reality. Bonhoeffer limits

²⁷Ethics, p. 145.

the mind to perceiving only the content, not the purpose or form, of creation. Perception is universalized by reason yet without reaching the formal determination, i.e., the divine orientation, of the natural. The inevitable conclusion to such a view is drawn by Bonhoeffer in refusing to accept the rational as an authority on the natural or the possibility of a rational certitude of its ethical norms. "The natural can never be something that is determined by any single part or any single authority within the fallen world."²⁸ The natural is adequately known by God alone.

In spite of this analysis of the rational, Bonhoeffer does speak of universal rights, duties and relationships which are natural. These universals are, in some way, ethically relevant, since their denial or perversion is the unnatural element of the world which distorts the will of God. However, the misrepresentation of some element of the natural is discovered by the self-corrective quality of natural life rather than rational analysis—a posteriori not a priori. Unified by the necessity of the penultimate, these rights, duties and relationships are the form of natural life.

The rights of natural life are explicated in terms of the principle "suum cuique: to each his own."²⁹ Respect for this principle is penultimate since it is due regard for the gifts of the Creator. Suum cuique is that dictum of Roman Law which is

²⁸Ibid., p. 147.

²⁹Ibid., p. 157.

the highest possible achievement of reason. This precept reaches the real privileges bestowed on natural life, without reaching God who authorizes them. Under this norm Bonhoeffer considers the natural rights of bodily life, and intended to analyse the natural rights of the life of the mind, the natural right to work and property, to fellowship, piety, happiness, mental and bodily self-defense.³⁰ Two things should be noted at this point; first, that Bonhoeffer gives concrete judgments on concrete issues such as euthanasia, suicide, and murder; secondly, Bonhoeffer's analysis of the penultimate makes it the place of legitimate consideration of moral principles and norms. This is a development of Bonhoeffer's earliest statement on ethics at Barcelona when he denied that any action could be called good or bad before its execution and that any principle could have general validity.

The universal duties of natural life are implied by the rights. Man's recognition of the rights of his nature necessitates the response to other men that can be categorized as responsibility or deputyship. The rights of the individual are also the rights of the entire natural order and thus prohibit self-assertion and demand altruism. Responsibility is the free acceptance of the obligation imposed by the "other's" rights. "Pertinence" is the obligation placed on one by the nature of inanimate things.³¹ Duties give prohibition and rights give

³⁰Bonhoeffer's outline for these chapter headings is extant, whereas he did not have time to complete these sections. Ethics, p. 186, n. 22.

³¹Ibid., pp. 235-36.

permission; they must remain together or ethics deteriorates to "the Kantian ethic of duty...or to the ethic of irresponsible genius."³² The right to self-preservation is balanced by the maxim that "all deliberate killing of innocent life is arbitrary."³³ The rights of marriage and reproduction necessarily imply the duties of a family.

Bonhoeffer's casuistry is the concrete application of his conception of the will of God as realized in definite and visible structures within human history. This insight provided Bonhoeffer with dogmatic and corrective goals for his ethical system. He attempted to reconcile the gospel and law, to account for the rational and the situation within ethical decisions, and to stimulate his fellow Christians to a more dynamic and social awareness of moral responsibility. Christology was the unifying element of Bonhoeffer's ethic, while the distinction between the ultimate and the penultimate was his working principle. This distinction was analysed and explicated in terms of the natural and the mandates, that is, in terms which were intelligible to "man come of age." However, the fusion of diverse elements and purposes within the ethical theory of Bonhoeffer, gives his system an eclectic character and poses the problem of internal consistency.

³²Ibid., p. 251.

³³Ibid., p. 160.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND CRITIQUE

Bonhoeffer was a Christian writing an ethics for Christians. This fact is the strength and weakness of his ethical formula. He attempted to show the relevance of faith to a free and fruitful movement through life. He hoped to present ethical attitudes for the believer that would replace the ideologies that faltered in the changing world. He intended to integrate Christianity and everyday life. Bonhoeffer's life is evidence that such an ethic is not only livable, but that it is worth dying for. However, the Christian ethic of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is Christian, i.e., supposes a Lutheran doctrine, and thus has a conditional and restricted application. Secondly, there is a lack of clarity in Bonhoeffer's explication. Bonhoeffer strains to include the rational and natural in a framework adapted to only one ethical criterion--the will of God. Finally, this chapter will try to establish that an irreconcilable tension exists between the dogmatic foundations of Bonhoeffer's thought and the experiential needs that he attempted to incorporate into his moral theology.

Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran theologian and his ethic is applicable to that audience which shares his theological starting points. Dogmas such as the corruption of the mind and heart of

man by the Fall, that man is justified by faith and not by works and even that man must sin boldly but believe more boldly are the presuppositions of Bonhoeffer's formulations. Consequently, an acceptance of these religious tenets is prior to the unqualified reception of Bonhoeffer's ethical work. Bonhoeffer tries to find purely natural evidence for these dogmas by an analysis of the radical immanence of philosophy and the fundamental indecisiveness of conscience. But Bonhoeffer's ethic is ever a facet of his theology. Any unorthodox interest such as a non-biblical terminology for the "world come of age" or natural ethical criteria is limited by the restrictions of his Lutheran premises.

Ethics as formation is possible only upon the foundation of the form of Jesus Christ which is present in His Church. The Church is the place where Jesus Christ's taking form is proclaimed and accomplished. It is this proclamation and this event that Christian ethics is designed to serve.¹

This definition of ethics excludes all non-Christian moral theory from the realm of the ethical. Ethical decision is that situation of solitude before the will of God, when the individual tries to exclude every criterion of judgment except the divine judgment. The ethical situation is not the clash of values or the conflict of moral principles or even the attempt to distinguish good and evil; rather it is activity commanded by God. Ethics is not concerned with "ought" or "should" but with the reality of Christ's present form. In effect, Bonhoeffer reserves ethics, in the true meaning of the word, for the domain of the

¹Ethics, p. 88.

ultimate. Man is rendered ethical in the realm of faith and justification. This notion of ethics is fully consistent with the theological anthropology proposed by Bonhoeffer. If one is not fully man until the moment of faith, then neither are one's activities truly human until that time. The unbeliever has no potential for moral behavior in Bonhoeffer's theory.

Ethics is not the attempt to determine the right and wrong of behavior prior to its execution. This sense of ethics is arbitrary. Bonhoeffer rejects a priori principles as a restriction of the ethical to the limits of conscience, which is the voice of man's essential disunification in the Fall. Conscience, principles, rational analysis, experience--all these are penultimate and belong to the realm of ethics only if they accept the fact that "it is the ultimate which determines the penultimate."² The real ethical judgment is that one executed by the believer who commits his activity to the mercy of God.

When Bonhoeffer says that the ethical is a "peripheral event" he means more than the sporadic experience of decision between good and evil. Man is not caught moment by moment in conscious choice between heaven or hell. However, Bonhoeffer would further regulate ethical language such as "ought" or "must" to the divine commandments and the ethical situation to the authority-obedience situation presented only in the ultimate.

The obligation of "shall" or "should" applies only to a peripheral situation, and this obligation is inwardly

²Ibid., p. 133.

disrupted, if from being a peripheral concept it is converted into a pedagogical method. "Shall" or "should" is always an "ultimate" word...If the ethical ceases to be understood as an "ultimate" word,...its place is taken by a trite and jejune moralization...What suffers the decisive loss here is not merely the abundant fulness of life but the very essence of the ethical itself.³

The importance of authorization for ethical consideration is yet another reason for claiming that the "ethical" in Bonhoeffer's theory is a Christian dimension. Not only what is said but who says it is critical to ethics, since ethics is a relationship established by commands of a superior. In the end, "God's commandment is the only warrant for ethical discourse."⁴ This authorization for ethics is granted only to Christian ethics and is considered only in terms of obedience or disobedience to the divine mandates.

The origin of the whole problem of ethics is the Fall. Only Revelational ethics has knowledge of this event. Christian ethics alone knows the will of God as the sole determinant of the good, and recognizes the domain of ethical concern by the command of God. Theological ethics therefore is more than the fulfillment of philosophical ethics--it is their denial. "The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of the Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge."⁵ Thus, Bonhoeffer's ethics condemns the non-believer

³Ibid., pp. 266-68.

⁴Ibid., p. 277.

⁵Ibid., p. 17.

to the meaningless and frustrating dilemma of experiencing ethical problems without possessing the freedom or the knowledge to achieve a moral solution. Bonhoeffer, therefore, has no intention of formulating an ethic adequate to evaluate and guide behavior for the non-Christian. The clarity and consistency of Bonhoeffer's ideas must, therefore, be considered regarding those who share Bonhoeffer's Christian premise.

Bonhoeffer's Lutheran principles, his conception of the effects of Original Sin and the meaning of the Redemption in Christ are strongly operative in his definition of the ethical.⁶ However, Ethics and his Letters and Papers from Prison show a development within Bonhoeffer's thought which tried seriously to account for the relative autonomy of the world, and the corresponding relative validity of purely "natural" ethics. The ultimate does not deny the penultimate; the Christian must respect "human and general conditions" and the "relevant questions of principle."⁷ Bonhoeffer advocates a system that includes facts as well as faith. But considering the demands of his theology and his Christological premise, it is questionable whether Bonhoeffer can make the natural and the rational to be morally relevant without being inconsistent. For instance, if creation was completely perverted by the Fall, then nature does not express

⁶These theological premises are not open to criticism by this paper except to request that they are not the only conclusions that have been drawn from revelation.

⁷Ethics, p. 248.

the will of God nor does it contain ethical norms evident to reason.

The metaphysic that underlies Bonhoeffer's ethics is not articulated but it is seen by its effects to be a type of voluntarism. The ontological status of finite being is established only in God's volitional relation to it. There is no continuity of being between the Creator and the creature, only a void. One may not even speak of the relation of cause and effect in terms that would condition the absolute freedom of God. The freedom of God is not even limited by the historical Word of God.⁸ The absolute distinction of God and the world is mediated by God's will actualized in Christ. Therefore the natural and the penultimate have an "analogy of relation" to the ground of all finitude, i.e., God.

The will of God through the Word of God can and does change through history; thus ethics must be free from absolute principles and norms to correspond to the present divine command. Yet, while professing the absolute freedom of God, and His changing will for man. Bonhoeffer also holds that the concept of potentiality cannot be applied to God. "The introduction of the concept of potentiality into the Christian idea of God represents a limiting of the divine omnipotence."⁹ It is difficult to see how God can change and yet be total act without any potentiality.

⁸Act and Being, p. 81.

⁹No Rusty Swords, p. 32.

The will of God can change or there is a limitation to the divine freedom, but the will of God must not change or there is an actualization of potency. This metaphysical difficulty with Bonhoeffer's notion of God reoccurs on the level of his ethical theory as a problem of how to give some content to morality.

One's ethical duty is derived from God's absolute power to impose obligation. This position is a type of positivism, i.e., obligation is posited by the will of God. That the will of God is the only ethical norm is consciously held in Bonhoeffer's earliest period.¹⁰ Karl Barth noted the positivistic quality of Bonhoeffer's moral theory. In 1931, Barth criticized Bonhoeffer for making Christ into an ethical principle and killing all other criteria. In Ethics, the concept of conformation shows Bonhoeffer's appreciation of the will of God as the sole determinant of goodness. Man's conformity with Christ is his only judgment of good or evil. Biblical positivism is indicative of the emphasis that Bonhoeffer gives the absolute freedom and power of God in his theology. The lack of absolute norms and principles is fully consistent with a voluntaristic notion of God.

However, Bonhoeffer attempts to give a meaningful place to natural criteria in ethics. This addition of natural principles which are valid in their own right is simply not consistent with Bonhoeffer's voluntarism-positivism. Bonhoeffer's addition of

¹⁰"There are no actions which are bad in themselves." No Rusty Swords, p. 44. "There cannot be good and evil as general ideas, but only as qualities of will making decisions." Ibid., p. 46.

content to ethics by the notions of the natural, penultimate and the mandates constitutes a logical burden on his premises. Considering Bonhoeffer's Natural Theology and his Christology, it is difficult to attribute ethical significance to anything save the will of God. A series of quotations will serve to demonstrate that in Bonhoeffer's ethic, priority is given to formalism rather than content.

- a) Content Bodily life, which we receive without any action on our own part, carries within itself the right to its own preservation. This is not a right that we have justly or unjustly appropriated to ourselves, but it is in the strictest sense an "innate" right, one which we have passively received and which pre-exists our will, a right which rests upon the nature of things as they are. (Ethics, p. 155.)
- b) Form And here we are confronted with the fact that natural life does not possess its right in itself, but only in God. (Ethics, p. 168.)
- a) Content From its origin there is inherent in every thing its own law of being, no matter whether this thing is a natural object or a product of the human mind, and no matter whether it is a material or an ideal entity. (Ethics, p. 236.)
- b) Form The origin, essence and goal of all reality is the real, that is to say, God in Jesus Christ. (Ethics, p. 235.)
- a) Content It is necessary in the given situation to observe, to weigh up, to assess and to decide, always within the limitations of human knowledge in general. One must risk looking into the immediate future; one must devote earnest thought to the consequences of one's actions; and one must endeavor to examine one's own motives and one's own heart. (Ethics, p. 233.)
- b) Form But because it was God who became man, it follows that responsible action, in the consciousness of the human character of its decision, can never itself anticipate the judgment as to whether it

is in conformity with its origin, its essence and its goals, but this judgment must be left entirely to God. (Ethics, p. 234.)

More sources could be cited but these are sufficient to show that every attempt of Bonhoeffer to give some intrinsic ethical value to the natural is futile. Content or metaphysical status of goodness and evil is not compatible with Bonhoeffer's positivism or with his voluntarism. Each effort to give ethical relevance to the penultimate is cancelled by the uncaused, un-conditioned freedom of the ultimate. How can nature have any ethical weight when it is neither a moral criterion nor per se good or bad? Rational deliberation and judgment on moral behavior are only the non-essential conditions of God's totally free acceptance or rejection. Consequently it is necessary to say that Bonhoeffer's attempt to give the world an ethical value is ineffective. The natural rights of the body, for instance, are inconsistent with the omni-present presupposition of justification by faith alone.

The specifications and directives that Bonhoeffer does draw from the natural realm are based on the supposition that the natural form of life is both an end and a means.¹¹ Rape, torture, etc., are "serious violations of the right which is given with the creation of man."¹² However, a human right which is an end in itself is a denial of Bonhoeffer's own definition of the "natural" and the fact of Original Sin. The natural is that which serves the plan of God: it is a means. That any aspect of

¹¹Ethics, p. 150.

¹²Ibid., p. 183.

the natural is an end in itself makes that aspect greater than the sum which is only preserved as a means to attain justification and redemption by God. The fact that any right "given with the creation" still exists within the fallen world denies the anthropology on which Bonhoeffer built his ethics. Content is a systematic difficulty regarding Bonhoeffer's theological starting points. Moreover, this exposition of the natural as an end in itself and founded upon creational rights is an inconsistency even within Bonhoeffer's ultimate-penultimate distinction.

Both in Bonhoeffer's definition of ethics and in his style of positivism there is a trace of provincialism. The truly ethical dimension is closed to the non-Christian and moreover, to any brand of Christianity that holds an analogy of being or an ontological relationship to God. Criticism of other ethical systems, theological and philosophical, is often accomplished with an unhealthy amount of generalization and stylization which is simply unfair to the complexity and detail of the individual's thought.¹³ Moreover, Bonhoeffer does not present his ethics with the purpose of convincing his readers of the truth value of his viewpoint. Bonhoeffer explicates an ethic for those who share his beliefs. Even Christians who share Bonhoeffer's concern for the determination of the will of God in their lives will find limited merit in the principle of conformation or the explanation of the gospel commandments as self-evident in their

¹³The reduction of philosophers into "pure" positions is admitted by Bonhoeffer! Act and Being, p. 19 and Ethics, p. 17.

concrete proclamation.

If the book [Ethics] is regarded as a working out of certain theological presuppositions, it has considerable merit, although evaluation of its consistency would still be a difficulty. But if it is regarded as a sustained argument for a certain viewpoint in ethics, it is disappointing.¹⁴

Bonhoeffer benefitted from the failures of past ethical systems. He saw the immaturity fostered by reliance on principles. He interpreted a law as an appeal to action rather than a prohibition. Bonhoeffer experienced the peripheral quality of ethical dilemma and one's psychological uncertainty concerning personal motives. Bonhoeffer envisioned the social dimension of ethics and noted the absence of any absolute ethical authority among men. The ethical importance of the situation or context was evident to Bonhoeffer. His Christian ethics was proposed as an alternative to the inaction and indecision fostered by weak ethical systems or ideologies.

However, the Christian ethic of Bonhoeffer has no educative quality. It is a questionable guide for man's effort to determine beforehand the right or wrong of an intended course of action. In the final analysis, the real moral judgment is made only by God. Bonhoeffer's ethics is labored by the juxtaposition of positivism and natural laws. There is a further lack of clarity in the relationship of ends and means which Bonhoeffer discusses regarding the penultimate-ultimate distinction. Even when

¹⁴Rollo Handy, "An Analytic and a Dogmatic Ethics," The Review of Metaphysics, X, 4 (June, 1957), p. 696.

his Christian premise is accepted, no meaningful method of determining the will and commandment of God is given by Bonhoeffer. In short, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's moral theology is more valuable for its criticism of other ethical systems, than for its positive achievement.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by David W. Clark has been read and approved by the director of the thesis. Furthermore, the final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

June 14, 1968
Date

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