9-6-2024

# The Meaning of Life's Broken Fragments: A Constructive Theology of Fragmentation Grounded in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theological Ethics

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# THE MEANING OF LIFE'S BROKEN FRAGMENTS: A CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY OF FRAGMENTATION GROUNDED IN DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN INTEGRATED STUDIES IN ETHICS AND THEOLOGY

BY
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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
AUGUST 2024

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I want to thank my husband, Wesley Dingman, for his unwavering support, prodigious patience, and extraordinary talent for making me a better person. Wes is also the means through which I came to know the true joys of my life—our three children, Teresa, John, and Ryan, who are the face of God for me.

Undoubtedly, my theology reflects my life, which undoubtedly reflects those who gave life to me and molded me into the person that I am. Therefore, I want to thank my parents, Brian and Judy Toomey, for a lifetime of love and support. I have been blessed with an inordinate amount of supportive and loving family members, and am also very grateful to Shannon, Brian, Kevin, Colleen, Meg, Joey, Moey, Pattie, Tami, Jenny, Grace, Lily, Evie, and Kev. Marriage carries with it the additional blessing of a second set of parents, so I also want to express my gratitude to Harold and Linda Dingman for their steady and caring presence in our lives.

I am very grateful for the companions that I have kept on my doctorate journey, especially Cathy, Shane, Karen, Molly, LaShaunda, and Kathleen: thank you for being my coworkers in the academic vineyard of the Lord and for often providing me with much needed sustenance.

Finally, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my dissertation director, Colby Dickinson, who knows and values my contributions to theology better than anyone else. Colby's vast wealth of knowledge and dedication to the field have been inspiring and

incredibly instructive. Thank you also to my readers, Mara Brecht and Miguel Diaz, for their insight and guidance. In the now 15 years that I have been formally studying theology, I have had the good fortune of several excellent mentors, including Susan Ross and Mike Schuck from Loyola University Chicago, as well as Roger Haight and James Cone from Union Theological Seminary, to whom I will always be greatly indebted.

There are many other people who deserve to be thanked by name. I recite these names in my thoughts and in my prayers.

For Ryan Fisher,
the best idea we ever had.
*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,*
*before you were born, I set you apart."*

I, the Teacher, … applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with…. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted…. And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly… Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent doing it, and … all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

—Ecclesiastes 1:12–13, 15, 17, 2:11

# PREFACE

## A TIME TO WAIT AND A TIME TO DISSERTATE:

## WRESTLING WITH A LIFE LIVED THEOLOGICALLY

> For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
>
> a time to be born, and a time to die;
> a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
> a time to kill, and a time to heal;
> a time to break down, and a time to build up;
> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
> a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
> a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
> a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
> a time to seek, and a time to lose;
> a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
> a time to tear, and a time to sew;
> a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
> a time to love, and a time to hate;
> a time for war, and a time for peace.
>
> What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time.
>
> —Ecclesiastes 3:1–11

James Cone used to tell me (and his other students) that "you have to write about what you *wrestle* with."[1] In Cone's Southern-reminiscent accent, the emphasized word was pronounced "wrassle," and it was always spoken emphatically. In the years that I studied under Cone, I came to understand that the true task of theology is the proper expression of one's theological wrestling. In this sense, Cone taught me that theology is an endeavor which far exceeds

1. I studied black liberation theology with James Cone while a student at Union Theological Seminary (2008-2013).

academic scholarship. Theology, when done correctly, is an ontological reality. It is an existential orientation; a way of *being* in the world. It is a state of being whose veracity is situated not only in the dedicated intellect, but also in guileless divulgence of the soul, indeed the whole self. It is done not only in reading and writing, but also, and more importantly, in dialoguing with life, in catching the movement of the Spirit, and, sometimes, in "chasing after wind."[2] With that in mind, I present this dissertation as the manifestation of one soul's theological wrestling over the course of 15 years.

**Kairos versus Chronos**

The wrestling of my soul that is the theology presented in the following dissertation was done on a *kairos* timeline, as differentiated from, and at times in conflict with a "*chronos*" timeline. The Greek word *kairos* translated into English means "right time" or "opportune time." It refers to the timeliness of an event and finds its fullest understanding in contrast to the Greek word *chronos*, which provides the root and definition of the English term "chronological." Christians understand *kairos* more deeply to mean "God's time."[3] This comes from Catholic retreat traditions and a biblical review of the use and meaning of the word "*karios*." Looking at the several times that *Kairos* appears in the Christian Scriptures, *kairos* or "God's time" can further be understood as a propitious moment for decision or action. It is an extraordinary moment, one that requires interpretation (an openness to the signs of the

2. Ecclesiastes 1:14.

3. This understanding of *kairos* as God's time is not my own; there is a long tradition in Catholicism of Kairos retreats for high school students based on this theme of "God's time."

times), faith,[4] and conversion.[5] *Kairos* can also be a dangerous time, a time that carries the critical burden of responsible recognition, for failing to apprehend the moment could result in immeasurable loss.[6] It is a time that calls for action and transformation, a change of life.[7] *Kairos* is a crisis of opportunity and of favor. It is a moment of grace.[8]

Unlike *chronos*, *kairos* is not orderly, consistent, or reliable. It is unexpected, inconvenient, even unrelenting. *Kairos* doesn't adhere to pre-determined schedules or deadlines. It does not respect established rhythms of life or cohere to academic timetables. It is in the *kairos* moments of my life that I have written this dissertation. True to God's own mysterious ways, these *kairos* moments popped up unexpectedly and crashed upon me with the force of a mighty wave. There have been moments when *kairos* forced me into times of "leave" or "break" when I would have preferred continuity and stability, and other times when *kairos* offered me aridity and desolation when the academic world requested progress and fruitfulness. Even more, were the times over the past five years when *Kairos* demanded wholly new forms of theology from me, not a theology of scholarship and action, but one of waiting, of just surviving even.

Throughout these times I wrestled with many things, but I wrestled most deeply with not knowing. Not knowing when to seek and when to lose; when to embrace and when to let go; when to keep and when to throw away; when to mourn and when to dance; when to

4. Luke 12:54–56.

5. Mark 1:14–15.

6. Luke 19:44.

7. Romans 13:11–13.

8. 1 Corinthians 6:1–2.

love and when to hate; when to live and when to die. It took me a long time to recognize this wrestling with unknowing as theology, and more specifically, as *my* theology, a theology of fragmentation, of ambiguity and loss, a theology of love. It is this theology I present in what follows.

In the footsteps of my great mentor, James Cone, I believe that the *way* in which theology is done is crucial. By this, I am not referring simply to a theology's methodological or hermeneutical orientations, although method and interpretive lens are of vital importance. However, *doing* theology begins not with books or writing. The true task of theology can only begin once the books and writing utensils have been put down, when one must go into the world and live what has been learned. Theology finds its validity or nullification in its own embodiment (in its own incarnation, you could say). As David Burrell asserts,

> As in any theological inquiry, everything turns on the way it is carried out; there can be no 'conclusion' apart from the mode of inquiry which arrives at it. For therein lies the test—the exercise which readers and critics can examine to determine whether what emerges is worth the effort.[9]

I hope you will find my theology worth the effort.

9. David B. Burrell, foreword to *Amidst Mass Atrocity and the Rubble of Theology: Searching for a Viable Theodicy*, by Peter Admirand (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), ix.

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# INTRODUCTION

Understood comprehensively, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's legacy offers contemporary American Catholicism a contextual approach to theological ethics that can meaningfully inform the development of an ethics of resistance to totalitarian and pseudo-religious forces that dominate U.S. politics today. Unfortunately, Catholic scholarship on Bonhoeffer overall has failed to grasp the full scope of his work and to incorporate his biography and the historical and theological context in which he lived. Therefore, although Catholic theologians often cite Bonhoeffer, they rarely engage his work comprehensively.

The English translation of the complete Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke (DBW)[1] by leading Protestant Bonhoeffer scholars offers an opportunity for American Catholic theologians to construct a more comprehensive understanding of Bonhoeffer's thought, his influence on the development of theology throughout the twentieth century, and Bonhoeffer's relevance for theology today. Making use of these critical resources, this dissertation brings Bonhoeffer into dialogue with modern and postmodern American Catholic theological contexts, specifically engaging Bonhoeffer's concept of *analogia relationis*, his incarnational Christocentrism, and his embrace of contextual ambiguity.

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition (DBWE) is a 17-volume compilation of Bonhoeffer's academic and personal writings. The translation project was completed in 2011 and the final volume was published in 2013. Throughout this dissertation, references to these volumes will be cited with the abbreviation DBWE and the volume number.

The chapters of this dissertation will proceed as follows: Chapter 1 provides a summary of the Catholic reception of Bonhoeffer explaining how it is lacking in depth. Chapter 2 will then present Bonhoeffer's theological ethics with an emphasis on his methodological prioritization of contextual ambiguity. Chapters 3 and 4 will place the major themes from chapter 2 in dialogue with modern American Catholic theological, philosophical, and sociological conversations.

In addition to the contribution this dissertation makes to Bonhoeffer scholarship and American Catholic thought, it is also a project of constructive theology insofar as the method and structure used throughout this dissertation suggest that the task of theology in twenty-first-century America is the task of sifting through fragments of failed Christian systems to distinguish the essentials of these systems from the incidentals. In so doing, such a theological method seeks to discover the valuable fragments that must take part in theology's future, and to emancipate this theological future from fragments that are broken beyond reprieve, and which therefore should remain consigned to history and to the dust and rubble of theology.[2]

Thusly, this dissertation dialogues with fragmentation and ambiguity as both an object of contemporary theology and a theological method.[3] Bonhoeffer's work provides

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2. I borrow the phrase "rubble of theology" from Peter Admirand, who explains that "such a term is meant to invoke reflection upon the violence and injustice that buries so many individuals in this world and the theological (and secular) explanations and systems that have ultimately failed to address or admit their loss, as loss." See Peter Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity and the Rubble of Theology: Searching for a Viable Theodicy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), xv–xvi.

3. For a detailed definition of fragmentation and ambiguity and a comprehensive explanation of how this dissertation interacts with it both methodologically and in content, please see the methodology section below.

a particularly cogent dialogue partner for such a constructive project because contextual ambiguity forms much of the foundation of his own theological anthropology and ethics.[4]

## Bonhoeffer's Legacy

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in February 1906 in Breslau, Germany (now Wrocław, Poland). Bonhoeffer was raised in a Lutheran family. However, later in his life he became one of the founding figures in the Confessing Church of Germany, which assembled as an established form of resistance to National Socialism and Nazi ideology.[5]

Bonhoeffer is well-known not only for the many contributions he made to theology, but also for his resistance to German National Socialism and participation in a plot to kill Hitler. Indeed, many biographical and theological investigations about Bonhoeffer have focused on his role as a co-conspirator and the ethical and theological ramifications of taking up such a role.[6] Bonhoeffer's participation in an attempt to kill Hitler ultimately resulted

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4. As explained in detail in chapter 4, Bonhoeffer understands *imago dei* as relationality (or, in the words of Clifford Green, as "sociality"; see Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999). Chapter 4 will also explain how this relationality has a direction as it moves humans toward freedom in God's lov.

5. For a detailed description of the Confessing Church and Bonhoeffer's role in it, see Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision, Man of Courage*, ed. Edwin Robertson, trans. Eric Mosbacher et al. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 590–626. Alternately, in her 2009 book, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Resistance*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 3–6, Sabine Dramm offers a brief but well written overview of the development of the Confessing Church as it relates to both the resistance to Nazism and to Bonhoeffer's life. Rainer Bucher's book, *Hitler's Theology: A Study in Political Religion*, ed. Michael Hoelzl, trans. Rebecca Pohl (New York: Continuum, 2011), presents an excellent analysis of Nazi ideology, especially as it resembles Christianity.

6. Some notable books about Bonhoeffer's role as a co-conspirator include Patricia McCormick, *The Plot to Kill Hitler: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Spy, Unlikely Hero* (New York: Balzer + Bray, 2016); Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy; A Righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010); Mark Thiessen Nation, Anthony G. Siegrist, and Daniel P. Umbel, *Bonhoeffer the Assassin? Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2013), and Petra Brown, *Bonhoeffer: God's Conspirator in a State of Exception* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

in his execution in April 1945 at a Nazi concentration camp in Flossenbürg. Several others who were also charged as conspirators were executed on the same day, including three other members of Bonhoeffer's family.

Although Bonhoeffer never produced a formal systematic theology, leading Protestant Bonhoeffer scholars have identified important aspects of overall cohesion and consistency in Bonhoeffer's works. Within contemporary secondary sources on Bonhoeffer, this is referred to as "Bonhoeffer's legacy."[7] Considering Bonhoeffer's legacy a "work-in-progress," Protestant theologian and prominent Bonhoeffer scholar Victoria Barnett points out that "despite the vast documentation" we have of Bonhoeffer's works "and the countless books that have been written about Bonhoeffer, his life and work remain fragmentary in many ways."[8] Barnett explains that neither the grand narrative of Bonhoeffer's legacy nor any one fragment of this narrative can fill in all the gaps. Therefore, in many ways, ambiguity will always characterize Bonhoeffer's works.[9]

Clifford Green and Guy Carter, two leading contributors to the collaborative work of constructing Bonhoeffer's legacy and editors of *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, point out that Dietrich Bonhoeffer "is simultaneously the

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7. The phrase "Bonhoeffer's legacy" is used in secondary sources, and throughout this dissertation, as a reference to the collective authoritative interpretations of Bonhoeffer that have emerged posthumously as the result of several prominent Protestant Bonhoeffer scholars.

8. Victoria J. Barnett, "The Bonhoeffer Legacy as Work-in-Progress: Reflections on a Fragmentary Series," in *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 93.

9. This is true not only because the grand narrative that is the foundation of Bonhoeffer's legacy is constructed out of fragments of his academic, pastoral, and personal writings, supplemented by the many biographies, historical records, and commentaries about Bonhoeffer, but also because, as I will explain in this dissertation, ambiguity characterizes Bonhoeffer's own theology in many ways.

most quoted and the most misinterpreted Christian theologian of the twentieth century."[10] Although Green and Carter direct their critique at mainstream Christian theology and other popular publications about Bonhoeffer in general, this dissertation specifically considers misinterpretations of Bonhoeffer's theology among Catholic theologians.

## Catholic Theologians on Bonhoeffer

Many twentieth- and twenty-first-century Catholic theologians reference the work of Bonhoeffer, but for the most part they have only superficially and selectively engaged Bonhoeffer, appropriating only snapshots of his work. From leading early twentieth-century and Vatican II theologians, such as Hans Küng and Henri de Lubac, to contemporary contextual theologians, such as Johann Baptist Metz and John Caputo, Catholic theologians since Bonhoeffer have frequently referenced key fragments of his thought.[11] Citing and quoting Bonhoeffer is so popular in Catholic theology that even Pope Francis references Bonhoeffer's work in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Lætitia* [*On Love in the Family*].[12]

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10. Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter, eds., *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), xi.

11. A description of how authors were selected through research is given at the beginning of chapter 1.

12. Francis writes, "The spiritual journey of each—as Dietrich Bonhoeffer nicely put it—needs to help them to a certain 'disillusionment' with regard to the other, to stop expecting from that person something which is proper to the love of God alone" (Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris lætitia* [*On Love in the Family*], March 19, 2016 (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2016), par. 321). I cite Pope Francis here as the highest authority within the institutional Church to emphasis the widespread popular use of Bonhoeffer and his ideas. The fact that the Pope refers to Bonhoeffer in *Amoris Lætitia* without providing background or explanation on who Bonhoeffer was implies to me an assumption on the Pope's part that Catholics in general (i.e. the intended audience of the apostolic exhortation) will recognize Bonhoeffer. Francis is referencing from Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 27.

Although they cite or quote Bonhoeffer often, Catholic theologians generally fail to consider the full scope of Bonhoeffer's work, his biography, the historical and theological context of his work, or secondary sources. This lack of meaningful engagement with Bonhoeffer causes many Catholic theologians to use him as a prop for their own arguments at the expense of seriously considering his own thought. It also implies a presumption on the part of Catholic theologians in general that there is nothing new to discover in Bonhoeffer and that he has little to constructively offer the field of Catholic theology or the contemporary Catholic Church.

By closely engaging Bonhoeffer's works and secondary sources in dialogue with leading Catholic thinkers, this dissertation aims to contribute to the creation of a more comprehensive understanding of Bonhoeffer's legacy and its relevance for the Catholic Church in the United States today.[13] Unfortunately, a comprehensive and properly nuanced account of the Catholic reception of Bonhoeffer is notably lacking in the vast secondary literature that exists about Bonhoeffer. Richard P. McBrien's incorporation of Bonhoeffer's ideas into several sections of his book *Catholicism* represents the most comprehensive attempt made to date to catalogue Bonhoeffer's relation to and influence on Catholic

13. In addition, Catholic theologians should care how Bonhoeffer is portrayed in Catholic theology as a simple matter of scholastic integrity. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was not only a leading twentieth century theologian, but also a martyr of the faith, often mentioned in the same sentence as Martin Luther King Jr., Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Saint Oscar Romero. The responsibility to develop a comprehensive understanding of Bonhoeffer's work is also compounded by the fact that his legacy is built largely on fragmentary and incomplete works. As such, Bonhoeffer's work will always contain some ambiguity, leaving it more vulnerable to misappropriations than more traditional systematic presentations of theology. A comprehensive interpretation of Bonhoeffer's legacy is also especially called for given the current anti-intellectual climate in the U.S., fueled by the emergence of what has been coined an "alternative-truth" political culture.

theology.[14] However, while McBrien's integration of Bonhoeffer's ideas into his wide-ranging description of the development of Catholic theology in the twentieth century is incisive, it provides simply a positive starting point for what is needed: a thorough cataloguing and critical examination of references made to Bonhoeffer in Catholic theology since his death in 1945. Such an undertaking is needed to better comprehend Bonhoeffer's influence on Catholic theology and to assess the potentiality of Bonhoeffer's thought to contribute constructively to contemporary theological conversations in the American Catholic Church. As Green and Carter explain, "Respect of the man, respect for the truth, and responsibility to future generations require more patience, more honesty, and more effort to truly understand the legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer."[15] As such, the work of this dissertation begins with an investigation and critical evaluation of the Catholic reception of Bonhoeffer. Conclusions drawn from this literature review will then be placed in dialogue with leading Protestant scholarship on Bonhoeffer, thereby filling in gaps left by selective and cursory Catholic coverage of Bonhoeffer and establishing a common understanding of Bonhoeffer's legacy from which to build constructive discussions between Bonhoeffer and Catholic theologians in the last two chapters of this dissertation.

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14. Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994). See the following sections: Part I: Human Existence, chap. 3, The Human Condition Today, re. The Modern World, Religion and Change, pp. 92–94; part II: God, Ch. 8 Religion & It's Varieties, re. The Problem, p. 246, re. The Notion of Religion, Defining Religion, p. 251, and re. Criticisms of Religion, p. 254; (c) Part III: Jesus Christ, Ch. 14 The Christ of the 20th Century, Current and Recent Protestant Christology, pp. 497–499, and re. Synthesis, pp. 503–504; (d) Part V: Christian Existence: Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions, Ch. 26: Christian Existence: Principles & Process, re. What Kind of Person is the Christian Called to Be?, The Theological Virtues, Hope, p. 974, and Ch. 28: Christian Spirituality, re. History of Christian Spirituality, 20th Century, Post-Vatican II, p. 1080; and (e) Conclusion, Ch. 30: Catholicism: A Synthesis, re. Catholicism in Context, p. 1170.

15. Green and Carter, *Interpreting Bonhoeffer*, xi.

## Place in the Christian Theological Tradition

This dissertation is grounded in the Roman Catholic theological tradition and is undertaken from a Catholic confessional perspective. However, the content and analysis draw from a variety of theological thinkers, especially Protestant thinkers who are experts on Bonhoeffer and his work. This project also engages scholars in the fields of philosophy and sociology.

The overarching questions that this dissertation addressses are: (1) How have Catholic theologians (mis)appropriated the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer? (2) Why should we care how Bonhoeffer is portrayed in Catholic theology? (3) How is Bonhoeffer's work relevant for Catholics in the U.S. today?

To understand Bonhoeffer's overall relevance to contemporary theology, we must first appreciate his relevance to Catholic theology. Many scholars, including several contemporary Bonhoeffer scholars, have already pointed out the parallels between National Socialism in Germany during Bonhoeffer's life and imperialist capitalism and neoliberalism in American society today.[16] Especially important to Catholic theology within these parallel situations is the tendency of totalizing political forces to hijack religious sentiment and use it to perpetuate unjust social and economic structures and to preserve oppression of certain

16. See Karen Bloomquist, "Radicalizing Reformation amid Today's Crises, in the Spirit of Bonhoeffer," in Luther, Bonhoeffer, and Public Ethics: Re-forming the Church of the Future, ed. Michael P. Dejonge and Clifford J. Green (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2018), 83–93; Karen Bloomquist, *Seeing-Remembering-Connecting: Subversive Practices of Being Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016); Heinrich Bedford-Strom, "Reformation: Freeing the Church for Authentic Public Witness," in *Luther, Bonhoeffer, and Public Ethics: Re-forming the Church of the Future*, ed. Michael P. Dejonge and Clifford J. Green (Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2018); Allan Aubrey Boesak, "Church, Racism and Resistance: Bonhoeffer and the Critical Dimension of Theological Integrity," in *Luther, Bonhoeffer, and Public Ethics*; Jennifer M. McBride, "Reformation through Repentance: The Church's Public Witness," in *Luther, Bonhoeffer, and Public Ethics*; Jennifer M. McBride, *Radical Discipleship: A Liturgical Politics of the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017); and Reggie L. Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

groups.[17] The fact that Bonhoeffer offered the "earliest and most consistent critiques of [Nazi] politicization of" the Church[18] is itself reason enough to make his theology an important ally to developing modes of resisting these totalizing quasi-religious forces.

Furthermore, there is an even more fundamental and crucial question for Catholic theology at stake in this issue: what kind of Church does the Catholic Church in America want to be today? The Catholic Church in the U.S. has, so far, largely failed to offer adequate theological and religious resources to effectively resist the hijacking of religious sentiment for the purpose of neoliberal political domination.[19] Looking at a similar question about the relevance of the institutional church[20] in his book *Theological Fragments: Confessing What We Know and Cannot Know about an Infinite God*, Latinx and liberation theologian Rubén Rosario Rodríguez does an excellent job of describing these neoliberal groups, including QAnon, Donald Trump and his supporters, White Christian Nationalist groups, and Alt-

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17. See Robert P. Ericksen, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer in History: Does Our Bonhoeffer Still Offend?," in *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); Boesak, "Church, Racism and Resistance," and Bloomquist, "Radicalizing Reformation."

18. Victoria J. Barnett, "Looking for Luther: 1933–1939," in *Luther, Bonhoeffer, and Public Ethics: Re-forming the Church of the Future*, ed. Michael P. Dejonge and Clifford J. Green (Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2018).

19. Paul Lakeland provides an excellent summary of the enormity of the challenge facing the Church in neoliberal America in his article "Spiritual Resistance: Theology in the Age of Neoliberalism" *Commonweal* 147, no. 6 (June 2020) : 24–29.

20. Throughout this dissertation I will use a capital "C" in the word "Church" to denote the Roman Catholic Church and a small letter "c" to signify all other church entities. I will also use the terms "institutional Church" and "institutional church" accordingly. I make specific reference to the small letter "c" institutional church here because Rosario Rodriguez is an ordained minister of the Word and Sacrament of in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), but he writes from his position as a Presbyterian miniter and a professor at a Catholic institution (Saint Louis University) and he explicitly writes to and about institutional Christian churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, not just the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Right factions.[21] Noting that he takes inspiration from Bonhoeffer[22], Rosario Rodríguez addresses the recent "rise of neofacist populism in the United States" and how it has been "shrouded with the aura of religious nationalism" in his chapter titled "The Myth of Political Sovereignty."[23]

Considering my own scholarly training, I will be approaching this work from the intersection of liberation theology and Catholic ecclesiology, which dictates the primary theological assumptions of this project and reveals that my interest in this project stems from the question that is at the core of all my theological work: What kind of church should the Catholic Church be today? Stated differently, my central theological investigation aims to uncover what forms Christian discipleship should take to effectively oppose and overcome systems of injustice, oppression, and marginalization in our world today. Bonhoeffer dedicated his life to this same endeavor, and he succeeded in embodying a theological ethics of resistance that leaves not only an inspirational witness of discipleship for theology today, but also issues forth an ethical mandate. My overall interest in Bonhoeffer flows from the mandate offered by his legacy to develop a justice-oriented praxis of discipleship that can speak meaningfully to believers today.

While the style and presuppositions of this dissertation have been heavily influenced by liberation and political theologies specifically, it does not exclusively belong to either of these categories, since my starting point is neither social/political liberation of oppressed

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21. Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, Theology Fragments: Confessing What We Know and Cannot Know about an Infinite God (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2023), 137–143.

22. Rosario Rodríguez, 62

23. Rosario Rodríguez, 138. Rosario Rodríguez's book is a great example overall of a theology of fragmentation (as his own aim was to do theology in fragments).

and marginalized peoples, nor is it primarily a commentary on the relationship between church and state. My starting point is the problematic reception of Bonhoeffer among Catholic theologians since his death. My engagement with Catholic thinkers on the topic of Bonhoeffer will be analytical in nature and done in close discussion with the leading contemporary Protestant Bonhoeffer scholars.

Although my project is also not properly systematic or fundamental, it is constructive in nature, especially in the later chapters where I place Bonhoeffer in dialogue with Catholic theologians and present an approach to theological ethics that embraces contextual ambiguity by grounding itself in an incarnational Christology. This approach also uses meaningful theological fragments as a foundation for an embodied ethics that aspires to be both ecclesiological and social in its influence. In many ways, my project also relies heavily on the insights of queer theology insomuch as the selection of content and the style of writing are designed to create a somewhat elusive experience for the reader attempting to simulate the decentralization of conventional "systems" and traditional "structures" of theology. Therefore, my dissertation fits most closely into the tradition of twenty-first-century contextual theologies, as I am specifically claiming Bonhoeffer directly for the context of U.S. Catholic theology today.

## Methodology

The methodology of this dissertation is grounded in two crucial presumptions, which both reflect Bonhoeffer's own approach. Firstly, this dissertation assumes that all theology is necessarily contextual. In other words, there is no theology for all people in every time

and place.[24] This is necessarily the case because theology is a human enterprise, which is essentially the insight of historical consciousness, but it is also an affirmation of the fact that historical context is more than just the existential reality underlying human life, and thus all human endeavors. For it is also true that it is in specific contexts that God chooses to reveal God's self to humanity. This affirmation is itself incarnational in nature, another methodological aspect in which this project mirrors its own subject. The fact that God chose to communicate God's fullest revelation of divine being through a particular person, in a particular place and time, makes the particularity of historical context essential to any meaningful theology. This is also why recovering a comprehensive understanding of Bonhoeffer's legacy specifically for the Catholic American context is a valuable theological endeavor.

The presupposition that theology is necessarily contextual undergirds the second major point on my methodological compass: ongoing divine revelation can be situated within personal experience, making personal experience a valid source for theological truth. This method reflects not only the influence of Bonhoeffer's approach to theological ethics, but also a congruence with many other twentieth- and twenty-first-century theologians.[25]

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24. This does not mean, however, that there are no universal theological truths. As a Christian theologian, I also affirm the universal significance of Jesus Christ. I contend that one of the essential tasks of theology is to be able to comment intelligently on the intricate interweaving of universality and particularly in relation to divine and human realities. On the one hand, we must ask: can a particular person, from a particular time and place be universally relevant? Christianity says yes and points to the incarnation as proof of this affirmation. On the other hand, we must investigate the relevance of such a universal truth to a particular place, time, and person. Part of what underlies Bonhoeffer's theological ethics (especially his concepts of discipleship and religionless Christianity) are closely related to these questions. In Bonhoeffer's work, these issues are framed under the question of: who is Christ for us today?

25. I refer here to numerous examples of not only liberation and contextual theologies, but also Catholic systematic theologians since Rahner, as well as Catholic social ethicists who ground

The claim of personal experience as a source for theology has two specific nuances that are key to this dissertation. First, from Bonhoeffer we learn that divine revelation, which has traditionally been categorized specifically in terms of "religious" or "mystical" experiences,[26] can also, in modern times, take place in "secular" experiences as well. Second, divine revelation expressed through personal experience is accessible not only to the person with whom it originally took place, but also through the theological mining of materials that document, record, and/or reflect on these personal experiences, which can then themselves serve as a source of theological truth for others. In other words, autobiographical and biographical writings, when understood as a genuine theological dialogue with a thinker's life (and therefore, with a specific historical context) can also be revelatory of God's action in the world, much like the experience of reading Scripture can, in and of itself, be an experience of revelation for the reader.[27] Such an understanding of the revelatory potential of auto/

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theological doctrine in human experience. Experience being understood as a source for theology can also be seen throughout the history of Christianity, particularly in the form of religious experience or the mystical tradition.

26. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, promulgated by Paul VI on November 18, 1965, as part of the Second Vatican Council outlines the magisterium's official theology of divine revelation, including the affirmation that the invisible God chooses to reveal God's self through God's own self-communication with humans ("speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets" (sec. 4)) and most fully in the incarnation of Christ. *Dei Verbum* also identifies the significance of the process of Apostolic Succession and the standards of scriptural interpretation to divine revelation.

27. I use the word "can" intentionally here; I would not, of course, make this claim about *all* auto/biographical writings and the experience of reading such materials. However, a genuine revelatory dialogue can take place when both an author and a reader of such texts interrogate the theological relevance of the writings for a particular contemporary situation. This is the type of theological project I undertake in this dissertation. It follows in the footsteps and relies heavily on similar projects within Bonhoeffer scholarship. One of the most important projects of this type is the publication of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke (ed. Eberhard Bethge et al., 18 vols. (Gütersloh, Germany: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1986–2013)) and its English translation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (series ed. Victoria J. Barnett and Barbara Wojhoski, 17 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996–2104)), without which Bonhoeffer's legacy would not be easily accessible to English speaking audiences.

biographical materials is particularly significant when working with fragmentary sources, as is the case with Bonhoeffer's legacy. Later in this dissertation I engage Peter Admirand's use of "traumatic witnessing" as an example of how auto/biographical materials can be a source of divine revelation. In *Amidst Mass Atrocities and the Rubble of Theology*, Admirand relies on personal testimonies from sufferers and survivors of mass atrocities as the foundation of a viable contemporary theodicy.[28] Admirand explains that a reviewer of his work has labelled him a "post-theodicist" because he proposes that a theodicist who is "cognizant of the suffering and frailty of this world" must seek to "locate or advocate a fragmented, but still viable meaning within and beyond it."[29] Admirand's embrace of fragmentation in method and content of theology is shared in this dissertation as well.

Research Process: Literature Review and Selection of Dialogue Partners

Chapter 1 of this dissertation reviews many Catholic theologians and their use of Bonhoeffer. References made to these theologians are purposefully brief and solely focused on their use of Bonhoeffer and his works. These references are by no means meant to be representations of the theology or biography of each individual author.

The authors selected for chapter 1 were chosen through a meticulous process of researching Catholic authors for any reference of Bonhoeffer. This research was initiated by compiling a list of as many Catholic theologians as possible who have published since Bonhoeffer. I was aided by the creation and vetting of this list by my dissertation director. Using the list as a guide, I then researched (online and in print) dozens of Catholic theologians (and similar thinkers) to chronicle their references to Bonhoeffer. This

28. Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity*, xviii–xxi.

29. Admirand, xviii, including n. 12.

research produced roughly 100 pages of notes. From these notes, I selected the authors who had engaged with Bonhoeffer multiple times and/or that ostensibly had a meaningful engagement with his work. On the recommendation of my dissertation director, I worked through these notes systematically by taking one theologian at a time and analyzing each of their engagements with Bonhoeffer. In this process, I wrote a brief summary for each individual theologian's usage of Bonhoeffer.

Chapter 1, like all chapters in this dissertation, was designed to be a dialogue among theologians. To provide methodological structure to the chapter while also achieving a dialogical tone, I compared the various summaries I had written about individual theologians and their engagement with Bonhoeffer. In so doing, points of convergence and transition among my analyses emerged naturally and I wove these pieces together in a narrative presentation of my literature review (rather than a topical presentation).

The comparison of my analyses provided another mode of selection when deciding which theologians to cover in chapter 1 and which to exclude. There were no purposeful inclusions or exclusions of certain theological voices. I wanted to present as wide a spectrum as possible of Catholic theological thinkers who engage Bonhoeffer. In this Introduction, I briefly mentioned Pope Francis to make a point that Bonhoeffer is so popular among Catholic thinkers that even the Pope can mention him in passing as if he is common knowledge in Catholic theological and faith circles. I treated other popes as I did all other Catholic theologians that I investigated and included what seemed connected.

Most of the theologians mentioned in chapter 1 (and throughout the dissertation) are white, male, and American or from Western Europe. It was not my intention to include only these voices or exclude others. Most of the published theological voices (in English

or German) until the twenty-first century were white and male due to societal structures prohibiting access to higher education of Black, African, Asian, Indigenous, and other persons of color. A more thorough investigation into these authors and their engagement with Bonhoeffer is crucial to continued understanding of Bonhoeffer's legacy, but it was beyond the scope of this project.[30]

Chapters 2–4 engage with scholars from various disciplines including philosophy, sociology and theology. These chapters reflect my intentional commitment to contextual concepts that are relevant to a theology of fragmentation and to Bonhoeffer's legacy (the two main topics of this dissertation) by laying out a history of ideas and linking those ideas with historical, social and theological developments. These sections are written as a

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30. The crucial work of engaging Bonhoeffer's legacy from the perspective of theologians representing all races and ethnicities is being undertaken by many scholars, including most notably American theologian Reggie Williams, author of *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, and South African theologian Allan Boesak, author of "Church, Racism and Resistance." Also notable is Michael Mawson recent book *Standing under the Cross: Essays on Bonhoeffer's Theology*, New Studies in Bonhoeffer's Theology (London: T&T Clark, 2023), which includes essays on Bonhoeffer's influence on James Cone. See also Daniel Dei and Dennis E. Akawobsa, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's perspective on racism," *HTS Theological Studies* 78, no. 1 (July 18, 2022); David Gides, "Parts for the System: Bonhoeffer and the Liberation Theologians" (paper, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Denver, CO, November 2022); Noreen Herzfeld, " 'I Can't Breathe': The Bible and Bonhoeffer on Race and Suffering in America." In *Handbook of Racism, Xenophobia, and Populism: All Forms of Discrimination in the United States and Around the Globe*, ed. Adebowale Akande (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2022), 165–172; Shayla A. Jordan, " 'To Be Saved Is to Be Gathered': Bonhoeffer on Discipleship, the Extraordinary Christian Life, and Fighting Racial Injustice." *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 18 no. 1 (December 2019); Michael Mawson, "The Stumbling Block and the Lynching Tree: Reading Bonhoeffer's Christology with James Cone" (paper, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Denver, CO, November 2022); Raimundo C. Barreto, Jr. "Bonhoeffer in Latin American Liberationist Christianity and Theology," chap. 13 in *T&T Clark Handbook of Political Theology*, ed. Rubén Rosario Rodríguez (London: T&T Clark, 2020); A. James Rudin, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Jewish Perspective" (paper, Evangelische Akademie Nordelbien, Hamburg, Germany, June 17, 1987); Nicholas Scott-Blakely, "The Legacy of Anti-Judaism in the Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer." *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 18 no. 1 (December 2019); Koert Verhagen, "Becoming a Disciple of the Counter Logos: Bonhoeffer's Confrontational Christology and the Death of White Supremacy" (unpublished paper, n.d. [2018?]); Reggie L. Williams, "Christ-Centered Concreteness: The Christian Activism of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 53 no. 3 (September 2014), 185–194.

dialogue among authors[31] and the writing is laid out as a textually communicated version of a mind map; one that leads the reader from where my thinking on a certain topic started to how those thoughts came to fruition and new meaning in the work of Bonhoeffer. These chapters pull together many thinkers and topics in an intentional approach that emphases the process of connecting ideas as much as it celebrates the result of such thought processes. This approach and method of writing is described in more detail in the section below titled "Hermeneutical Considerations."

## Writing Method

Although my research for this project was performed systematically with methodical tediousness, the writing itself is intentionally non-traditional, employing a presentation method that is meant to push back against conventional structures of theological scholarship. It is a writing method that privileges dialectical structure, emphasizes contextualizing ideas, and intentionally employs ambiguity. Although the writing style is unconventional, the goal of my writing method, consistent with conventional scholarly methods is to present valid scholarship that can dialogue respectfully and meaningfully with traditional systematics (acknowledging systematic theology as the most significant and leading voice in theological scholarship).

In many ways, my project relies heavily on the insights of queer theology as much as contextual theologies, and it is a style that attempts to create an experience of theology for the reader (in addition to conveying important scholarship). As such, the writing is continuously aware of the experience of the reader and aims to create a somewhat elusive

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31. As much as possible, I have tried to design a coffee table conversation simulation in writing. Instead of organizing sections topically, I constructed a dialogue between theologians much like the way a conversation would take place between these thinkers.

experience for the reader, simulating a decentralization of conventional systems and traditional structures. My writing style is purposefully porous because one of the goals is to imitate an experience of the disintegration of theological systems for the reader.

**Making More Meaning: Writing and Reading as Co-Creation**

My writing method aims to create a process of reading that is a continual act of co-creation between the author and the reader (versus a writing method that dictates to the reader what knowledge they should apprehend as a result of the reading). This style is a result of my own tendencies as a researcher and reader. When I am reading theology, I am often most engaged with the reading when I am linking what I am reading with other theologians and disciplines. Reading for the sake of rote memorization has never interested me. True acquisition of knowledge, for me, comes from constantly comparing, conjuring, and connecting ideas; creating new understandings which help me to better understand each scholar or concept in their own right and fullness. This experience often leads to a certain disintegration of an intended systematic and orderly acquisition of ideas. This way of reading and researching meanders more than it conforms, but the results seem more fruitful to me, as in the end structures always reemerge richer, with an end product of multifaceted meaning and possibilities.

My writing method thus reflects my reading and research method in that it is a style of writing meant to leave room for the input and the relevant divergences of the reader, so that, in the end, the reader experiences not only a certain disintegration of structure but also has the opportunity to put the pieces back together (incorporating also their own connections and pieces of information) resulting in an end product that carries more meaning than what the author intended alone. Thus, *making more meaning* than what was started with, more

meaning than the fragments alone represent (speaking directly to my title "Making More Meaning of Life's Broken Fragments"). Published writing, in and of itself, represents only a fragment of one individual's thoughts and beliefs, even if it is carefully prepared to be as comprehensive a presentation as possible.

Ultimately, my writing style reflects a developing theology of fragmentation that guides my work and attempts to transcend conventional structures to reflect my foundational belief that it is not worldly systems (be they conventional or not) that are determinative and essential to theology and to life. Instead, it is the love of God, a love that says, "I free you" that gives meaning to all theology.

**Writing in the Footsteps of Bonhoeffer: Ambiguity in Action**

By embracing ambiguity as foundational to his theological ethics, Bonhoeffer challenges us to move beyond an understanding of ethics as a continuous linear progression toward the identification of actions, thoughts, and attitudes that can be categorized as "right" and "wrong." Bonhoeffer's ethics teaches us that in the modern era (what he calls a "world come of age"), faith in Jesus Christ as a continuous compass of action must replace certainty in codes of behavior, even codes of behavior that have been long-standing establishments of Christian institutions. Such an approach to theological ethics also emphasizes the importance of personal experience as a source for theology and echoes Peter Admirand, who points out that when trying to make sense of the mass atrocities and horrific suffering of various oppressive and genocidal events of the twentieth century (including the Holocaust), theology is complicated by a "moral horizon where the line separating the 'good' from the 'bad' is often inaccurate or blurry."[32] He asserts that "for a theodicy to still be meaningful and relevant … it

32. Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity*, xxv.

must immerse itself within this conflicting, often ambiguous world."[33] Admirand specifically makes this claim for theodicy, but I contend that all theology done in the wake of human suffering and death is necessarily theodicy. Therefore, with Admirand, I argue that for theology to still be meaningful and relevant it must immerse itself within the world.

An approach such as this is especially necessary for theological ethics in the U.S. today due to the profound polarization that has emerged in the Catholic Church between so-called "conservative" and "progressive" or "liberal" Catholics. Much of this polarization reflects the tension between a legalistic commitment to rigid moral codes versus a contextual (or "relativistic") approach to ethics that has been central to the Church in the modern world. This tension, and the resulting polarization of American Catholics, has left Catholicism and Catholic believers vulnerable to political hijacking. By bringing Bonhoeffer's approach to ethics, which was significantly shaped by his life experiences in a similar political climate, into dialogue with this situation, this dissertation attempts to shed light on how to diffuse the tension and resist the politicization of Catholicism by totalitarian forces.[34]

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33. Admirand, xxv.

34. Although imperial capitalistic and neoliberalist forces have been amassing political influence and power over much of the past century, the 2016 election of Donald Trump as President represents a pivotal moment of success for them. Such a political situation is comparable to the rise of National Socialism and the election of Adolf Hitler in Germany in the 1930s. Parallels that can be drawn between the social-political situation in the U.S. today to Nazi Germany make the need for a relevant Catholic ethical response even greater. However, the Catholic Church in the U.S. has largely failed to offer adequate theological and religious resources to Catholics in America to resist effectively the hijacking of religious sentiment for the purpose of neoliberal political domination. This dissertation aims to address this failure in two ways. Firstly, by highlighting three aspects of Bonhoeffer's ethics that are especially relevant to the development of an ethics of resistance for the current U.S. political context; these are (1) an incarnational Christocentric worldview, (2) embrace of contextual ambiguity, and (3) validation of personal experience as a revelatory source for theology. Secondly, by placing these aspects in dialogue with the history of ideas and mainstream Catholic theologians throughout the twentieth century.

Bonhoeffer's theology evolved overtime in dialogue with the world, his life, and his socio-political context. Catholic theologian Gerald O'Collins points to Bonhoeffer's process of development as an example of a personal experience with God's on-going self-revelation. Embracing the same contextual nature of theology as Bonhoeffer himself did, Protestant theologian Florian Schmitz identifies the approach that Bonhoeffer developed as an "incredible ability to update his theology." Schmitz suggests, therefore, that Bonhoeffer's relevance for ethics today is situated in a "way of thinking that leads Bonhoeffer to his answers," versus the actual answers themselves.[35] In concert with these thinkers, this dissertation contends that Bonhoeffer's relevance for today is not solely situated in his specific ethical and theological formulations, but instead in his approach to theological ethics.[36]

## A Theology of Fragmentation versus Proof Texting

As I have explained throughout this introduction, my dissertation not only relies on fragments of work, but also affirms the significance and theological meaning of fragments. However, it is important to distinguish between weaving together fragments of theological

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35. Florian Schmitz, "Reading Discipleship and Ethics Together: Implications for Ethics and Public Life," in *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 153.

36. This dissertation itself stands as the most basic example of Bonhoeffer's relevance in this way as I have written it in such a way as to be faithful to Bonhoeffer's own method. Modelled on Bonhoeffer, I have intentionally allowed my theology to evolve over many years in dialogue with theological and interdisciplinary academic contexts, socio-political and religious contexts, and, as especially similar to Bonhoeffer, with the context of my own life (as I phrase it in the Preface, I have written this dissertation in the kairos of my life). Had I rushed through my doctoral candidacy and my writing, rather than allowing it to slowly be saturated by the reality of my life and by American Catholic life, this dissertation would not have as much meaning to offer as I believe it does as a constructive project in a theology of fragmentation grounded in Bonhoeffer's own method.

systems and proof texting, especially since I argue in chapter 1 that some Catholic theologians have made the mistake of proof texting Bonhoeffer's works. This section outlines a theology of fragmentation that guides how I approach understanding, writing about, and creating deeper meaning with fragments.

A theology of fragmentation embraces ambiguity and the human experience of it as a valid source of God's revelation and presents theology as an interactive experience for the reader. Insofar as it takes seriously the need to "leave room for the Spirit," a theology of fragmentation resists the tendency to present detailed arguments about what is true, proven, or correct. Instead, it approaches the reader collaboratively, leaving room for their input, which the author cannot fully anticipate. As such, a theology of fragmentation poses more questions than it provides answers. In his own project of theological fragmentation, Admirand asserts that "it is hubris to claim to have answers to unanswerable questions. But such questions—as part of their burden and worth—must still be asked, investigated, and contemplated."[37] The primary question posed by a theology of fragmentation is aimed at the reader and asks: how does this make sense in your context? What about this is useful and relevant to the context you are in?

A theology of fragmentation is an invitation to the reader, not a dictation. It encourages the reader to consider God and ponder existence from different perspectives. It entices the reader to find meaningful relevance in their life, situation, and ideas. A theology of fragmentation invites readers to wrestle with reality and with faith. It offers readers the opportunity to encounter God in new, perhaps even confusing ways and aspires to reflect the

37. Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity*, xv.

experience of reading scripture, which should always be a personal encounter with the living God.

A theology of fragmentation purposely leaves gaps at the convergence of multifaceted ideas, leaving room for readers to fill in the gaps with their own context, knowledge, and experience, thereby co-creating a final product of the reading. Since an author can never completely anticipate the readership, what the reader takes away from their experience of reading theology is always necessarily more than and less than what the author intends to convey. David Burrell puts it in the following way when describing Admirand's "fragmented, but still viable" theodicy,[38]

> in any theological inquiry, everything turns on the way it is carried out; there can be no 'conclusion' apart from the mode of inquiry which arrives at it. For therein lies the test—the exercise which readers and critics can examine to determine whether what emerges is worth the effort.[39]

Burrell goes on to point out that Admirand succeeds in his attempt, "however broken or inarticulate" the outcome.[40] Speaking of Admirand's attempt to present a humble yet viable theodicy, Burrell explains that "the result will necessarily be expressed in fragmented, fractured language, for the theodicy [Admirand] begins to articulate cannot result in answers given, but rather in asking the questions correctly."[41]

While Admirand speaks specifically about a subdiscipline of theology coined "theodicy," I argue that all theology done in the wake of human suffering and death, including

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38. Admirand, xviii.

39. David B. Burrell, foreword to *Amidst Mass Atrocity and the Rubble of Theology: Searching for a Viable Theodicy*, by Peter Admirand (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), ix.

40. Burrell, foreword to *Amidst Mass Atrocity*, x.

41. Burrell, x.

this dissertation which is done in the shadow of the Shoah, is necessarily theodicy by nature.[42] Therefore, with Admirand, I argue that for a theology to still be meaningful and relevant it must immerse itself within the ambiguity of the world.

In this way, reading is an experience of theology, and that theological experience is itself characterized by ambiguity. Writing a theology of fragmentation is necessarily and purposely "unfinished" in some ways, because the finished or the final product needs to be the co-creation of the reader and the author. For this reason, a theology of fragmentation it intentionally not systematic in a traditional way,[43] but it does provide structure by relying heavily on contextualization. Providing a history of ideas gives shape, structure, and direction to the fragments of theology that are being pulled together and the emphasis is on intersectionality and an uncovering of interdisciplinary patterns of thought.

A theology of fragmentation understands that Christian theology cannot be rooted solely in the institutions, doctrines, and paradigms that have traditionally dominated Christianity. Therefore, a theology of fragmentation attempts to capture both the plurality of experience within the Catholic Church and those aspects/areas of Christianity that have been

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42. I believe it is reasonable to argue that all theology is necessarily theodicy. That is, all theology is an apologetic trying to answer the question: Why do humans suffer? This is especially true when considering God's sovereign features of omnipotence, benevolence and omniscience. Therefore, all theology that aims to honors these essential features of the Chrisitan God and still speak meaningfully to Christians today amidst the suffering of the innocent and the cry of the poor and the marginalized must also be considered a valid theodicy.

43. Doing theology as fragmentation will vary from strictly traditional models of systematic theological writing in two significant ways. Firstly, the essays presented in this dissertation will not adhere strictly to the structural logic of academic writing per the Chicago School which traditionally proceeds from *praefatio*, to *disputatio*, to *conclusio*. Secondly, this dissertation suggests multiple theses which are connected by their relevance to constructing a postmodern theology of fragmentation, as opposed to the conventional academic format of providing one thesis which grounds the entire project. The overall coherence of the material presented will be suggested throughout the dissertation, but not continually made explicit.

traditionally non-dominant. A theology of fragmentation, similar to queer theology, knows that authentic theology must come from the margins; not just the margins of society, but the margins of theology itself.

A theology of fragmentation must also take seriously the fragmentation of divine revelation, and as such takes for granted that the context of theology is both religiously and ecumenically pluralistic. This constructive theology contends that in order for Christian theology to be relevant in this context it must find claims to uniqueness that do not negate the ways in which divine reality achieves expression in other religions and non-religious traditions (hence the emphasis on interdisciplinary dialogue).

For many reasons, a theology of fragmentation can feel disjointed or jarring to readers who are most familiar with academic publications and promulgations of the institutional Catholic Church, for as Admirand explains, "most of us deeply want to know we are right and have certitude in our faith and path. Few of us cherish unanswered or only partially answered questions."[44] "And yet," Admirand continues, "such unanswered questions spur the need for openness, searching, and faith,"[45] which is what this dissertation hopes to accomplish. The goal of a theology of fragmentation is that it both "exposes faith-shattering themes and stories" and "help secure one's faith in an embrace of questions, fragments, hope, and … partnership."[46]

Mark Lewis Taylor's juxtaposing of "the theological" with "guild Theology" is also relevant here. In *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World*, Taylor takes

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44. Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity*, xxvi.

45. Admirand, xxvi.

46. Admirand, xxvi.

issue with so-called guild Theology for its overemphasis on transcendence and Christian tradition.[47] More specifically, Taylor defines "guild Theology" (which he intentionally spells with a capital "T") as "a credentialed profession in especially the Christian West that typically reflects on doctrines of a religious tradition and fosters an ethos of transcendence." He opts instead for "the theological," which he describes as "a specter haunting Theology" that is "already unsettling [Theology], perhaps dissolving it, disseminating it anew among other languages and other disciplinary discourses."[48] While Taylor's theories will be examined in more detail in chapter 3, what is most relevant to a theology of fragmentation is Taylor's claim that non-traditional, non-systemic, and non-doctrinal expressions of the theological rival the diminishing influence that guild Theology enjoyed for centuries.[49]

The situation of political and religious polarization, the lack of integrity displayed by politicians and priests alike,[50] and "the retreat of Western liberalism" necessitates a new movement of ethical resistance.[51] Similar to Bonhoeffer's preoccupation with "the concrete form of the church amid grave uncertainty" and the church's "impoverished spiritual formation"[52] in the time of the rise of National Socialism in Germany, U.S. Catholics should

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47. Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011). (xi).

48. Taylor, xi.

49. Taylor, 14; Talking specifically of poetry and prose, Taylor asserts "In terms of liberatory and transformative potential, Theology's doctrinal language is no rival to the symbolic language of such an art-force."

50. I refer here to the emergence of "fake news" in American culture as well as the sex scandal that has swept not only the US, but also many other nations in the past two decades.

51. See Edward Luce, *The Retreat of Western Liberalism* (London: Little, Brown, 2017).

52. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Berlin: 1932–1933*, German edition ed. Carsten Nicolaisen and Ernst-Albert Scharffenorth, English edition ed. Larry R. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins,

be equally concerned with the failure of both the Academy and Church leadership to prevent and resist political forces that not only seek America's destruction, but also threaten creation itself.[53] In response to the atmosphere of chaos and destabilization created by these cultural shifts, and in order to resist deformation of the Christian message, theology must pivot; shift its position and game plan. A theology of fragmentation proposes to do just this; it offers a new wineskin for the old wine that is the liberating message and good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Such a theology is distinguishable from proof texting in several important ways. Proof texting is specifically taking a fragment of a completed whole out of context, which is what the first chapter addresses (i.e. how some Catholic theologians have taken snippets of Bonhoeffer without considering the whole of his legacy, which has resulted in Bonhoeffer being used as a prop for other theological arguments, and, in some cases, specifically Catholic arguments). In addition to missing the whole picture of Bonhoeffer, pieces of Bonhoeffer's work that are taken from *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* in particular come from specifically unfinished and informal works, making the need for being fully informed of Bonhoeffer's legacy all the more necessary (since there is no formal or proper "whole" to take from, only pieces placed next to each other).

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supplementary material trans. Douglas W. Stott, DBWE 12 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 7.

53. See Naomi Kline, *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017), for an overview of the US political crisis initiated by the presidency of Donald Trump and the power of climate deniers in the US, especially chap. 8, "Masters of Disaster: Doing an End Run around Democracy." In addition, see Miguel A. De La Torre, "*¡Basta!*," introduction to *Faith and Resistance in the Age of Trump*, ed. Miguel A. De La Torre (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), who provides an excellent point of entry into the theological and ethical ramifications of these crises.

A theology of fragmentation, which is inherently open, even inviting to questions, necessarily clashes with proof texting, which is often used specifically to close off the possibility of further questions about a topic by using pieces of other works to bolster or cement an existing system, framework, or concept. In contrast to this, a theology of fragmentation self-consciously resists the urge to use any fragments to support a pre-existing set of meanings.

While a theology of fragmentation does take fragments from whole works, it also takes the whole of the meaning. It takes the whole meanings of various fragments and places them in dialogue with each other, thus making more meaning out of the fragments (to reference the title of this dissertation again). A good example of this would be Bonhoeffer's use of the phrase "*etsi dues non daretur*."

Nearing the end of his life, while in Tegel prison, Bonhoeffer wrote to his good friend Eberhard Bethge from prison often of the development of his theological ideas.[54] Much of what he wrote to Bethge in these letters were reflections of Bonhoeffer's ideas about how Germany and Christianity would have to rebuild itself post-Hitler. The origin of his famous and oft-quoted phrase "religionless Christianity" can be traced to this same conversation via letters with Bethge.

Continuing the discussion, in a letter dated July 16, 1944, Bonhoeffer writes to Bethge very briefly about how Christianity continues in a so-called "religionless" way. I quote Bonhoeffer at some length here for three reasons: 1) this dissertation is committed

54. These letters, along with letters he wrote to other friends and family and other writings from prison such as poems became the body of works posthumously published under the title *Letters and Papers from Prison*. You can see clearly in these works how Bonhoeffer's theological concepts were influenced by his encounter with suffering, not only his own, but also that of the Jewish people.

to mirroring Bonhoeffer's owns words as closely as possible so as to avoid falling into any caricatures of Bonhoeffer that have become popular since his death, 2) quoting extensively here will help to clearly exemplify my point about extracting a fragment from the whole, and 3) this particular section from Bonhoeffer's writing will also exemplify another pattern of his writing which I aim to mimic in my own, which is how he traces a history of interdisciplinary ideas in order to make sense of a theological concept. Bonhoeffer explains:

> I'm just working gradually toward the nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts…Historically there is just one major development leading to the world's autonomy. In theology it was Lord Herbert of Cherbury who first asserted that reason is sufficient for religious understanding. In moral philosophy Montaigne and Bodin substitute rules for life for the commandments. In political philosophy Macchiavelli separates politics from general morality and founds the doctrine of reason of state. Later H. Grotius, very different from Machiavelli in content, but following the same trend towards the autonomy of human society, sets up his natural law as an international law, which is valid etsi deus non daretur, "as if there were no God." Finally, the philosophical closing line: on one hand, the deism of Descartes: the world is a mechanism that keeps running by itself without God's intervention; on the other hand, Spinoza's pantheism: God is nature. Kant is basically a deist; Fichte and Hegel are pantheists. In every case the autonomy of human beings and the world is the goal of thought. (In the natural sciences this obviously begins with Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno and their—"heretical"—doctrine of the infinity of the universe [der Welt]. The cosmos of antiquity is finite, as is the created world of medieval thought. An infinite universe—however it is conceived—is self-subsisting, "etsi deus non daretur." However, modern physics now doubts that the universe is infinite, yet without falling back to the earlier notions of its finitude.) As a working hypothesis for morality, politics, and the natural sciences, God has been overcome and done away with, but also as a working hypothesis for philosophy and religion (Feuerbach!). It is a matter of intellectual integrity to drop this working hypothesis, or eliminate it as far as possible…So where is any room left for God? Ask those who are anxious, and since they don't have an answer, they condemn the entire development that has brought them to this impasse. I have already written to you about the various escape routes out of this space that has become too narrow. What could be added to that is the salto mortale back to the Middle Ages. But the medieval principle is heteronomy, in the form of clericalism. The return to that is only a council of despair, a sacrifice made only at the cost of intellectual integrity…There is no such way—at not by willfully throwing away one's inner integrity, but only in the sense of Matt. 18:3, that is, through repentance, through ultimate honesty! And we cannot be honest unless we recognize that we have to live in the world—"etsi deus non daretur." And this is precisely what we do recognize—before God! God himself compels us to recognize it.

> Thus our coming of age leads to a truer recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as those who manage their lives without God. The same God who is with us is the God who forsake us (Mark 15:34!). The same God who makes us to live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God, and with God, we live without God. God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross; God is weak and powerless in the world and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us. Matt. 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us not by virtue of omnipotence but rather by virtue of his weakness and suffering! This is the crucial distinction between Christianity and all religions. Human religiosity directs people in need to the power of God in the world…The Bible directs people toward the powerlessness and suffering of God; only the suffering God can help. To this extent, one may say that the previously described development toward the world's coming of age, which has cleared the way by eliminating a false notion of God, free us to see the God of the Bible, who gains ground and power in the world by being powerless. This will probably be the starting point of our "worldly interpretation." (sic)

When looked at closely and in full context, it is clear that what was later taken as a foundational statement for so-called "death of God" theorists was taken out of context. Bonhoeffer was in no way advocating for, or even lamenting the "death" of the Christian God. Here we can see Bonhoeffer finding inspiration and fortitude in the radically incarnational Christian God who works in and through the developments of the world and the advancements of human knowledge to continue to move humans into loving relationship with each other.

Bonhoeffer's concept of etsi deus non daretur did not develop because he thinks that there is no place for God in the world anymore. Rather, Bonhoeffer is tracing the work of God's own hand through the human world, even through the Enlightenment and the secularization of thought. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer tells us that as Christians we should not be threatened by this new way of being in the world that God has evolved into relationship with human developments, because "powerlessness" in the way God has chosen to relate to the world already; in the actions of his son Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christians should not

reject or rebel against secularization. Rather, we should embrace the movement of the world, the direction of human knowledge and development, knowing it contains no threat to God. Ultimately, Bonhoeffer's argument relies on the reality that human beings must act for God in the world. Which is why acting in conformation to Christ (which will be discussed at length in Chapter 3) is so crucial.

In terms of taking this fragment (*etsi deus non daretur*) from Bonhoeffer and using the whole of its meaning, I will do this in chapter 4 when I place Bonhoeffer's concept of etsi deus non daretur in dialogue with my own constructive argument that God's is a love that says "I free you."

Etsi deus non dartur is only one small fragment of Bonhoefer's work, but as can be seen in the extended quote above, it carries with it a depth of meaning that would not be clear without understanding Bonhoeffer's context and the full corpus of his works. The idea of a theology of fragmentation is to take the full meaning of the fragment like this, which carries with it the full potential of the whole. In doing so, the full potential and whole meaning is joined with other fragments and the essentials of Christian theology (formerly fortified within systematics) are maintained. The full potential each fragment carries is unlocked in its connection with the other fragments. This is what helps to avoid using another theologian's "fragments" or pieces as a prop for one's own theological system and instead tries to weave together multiple voices to create an abundance of meaning, rich in theological validity and wholeness.

## Sources

The analysis of Bonhoeffer's work in this dissertation relies on some primary sources that can generally be categorized as informal (as compared to writing which is formally prepared

for scholarly publication). Although Bonhoeffer's two dissertations, "*Sactorum Communio*" (1927) and "Akt und Sein" (Act and Being, 1929–1930), and *Discipleship* were traditional academic publications, it is widely known that Bonhoeffer's book *Ethics* was unfinished at his death,[55] and, as is indicated by its title, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, consists of personal correspondence, notes, and poems. Thus, *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* were not explicitly meant for publication in the form in which they exist now. However, these books are prominent among the corpus of writings that scholars use to identify and interpret Bonhoeffer's theological and ethical constructs. Therefore, I engage both *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*, as well as other "non-academic" or less formal writings of Bonhoeffer's, which have all now been published in DBWE and are accepted among Bonhoeffer scholars as authoritative theological sources.

Nevertheless, the informal and unpolished nature of many of Bonhoeffer's publications necessitates a nuanced approach to the study of Bonhoeffer's writings. The fragmentary and incomplete nature of these writings lends itself to a non-traditional investigative approach, such as one which seeks to embrace ambiguity and fragmentation as foundational theological constants (versus an approach which would seek to identify a logically progressive development of thought predominantly characterized by distinctions such as continuity versus discontinuity in conceptual frameworks). In so doing, this dissertation joins the tradition of contextual theologies of challenging the idea of what properly constitutes "theology" as more than academic and scholarly writings and asserts

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55. Eberhard Bethge informs us that what has been published under the title *Ethics* represents four different attempts that Bonhoeffer makes to explain his ethics. Therefore, as Eberhard Bethge explains, *Ethics*, in actuality, is a collection of "fragments consisting of several approaches fitted together" (Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. and ed. Victoria J. Barnett, trans. Eric Mosbacher et al., rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 622.

that personal experiences (as communicated through personal correspondence and auto/biographical writings) are valid sources of theology.

It is important to be clear that this project is not one of hagiography. In fact, leading Bonhoeffer scholars ask theologians to remember that Bonhoeffer is neither a saint nor was he a central figure in his church in his own lifetime. In fact, Barnett points out that Bonhoeffer's popularity since his death and identification of him as a well-known figure in the Confessing Church is misleading, as his role in that church during his life was actually marginal and troublesome.[56] Nor should we assume a monolithic reception of Bonhoeffer even among Protestants, especially in Bonhoeffer's homeland of Germany.[57] Therefore, it is important not to allow popular legacies of Bonhoeffer to influence a proper understanding of what he truly has to offer Catholicism today. Doing so would confuse glorification of an individual (what Christianity would call idolatry) with the real pursuit of uncovering the revelatory experience of the everyday Christian.

This dissertation adopts three specific perspectives in order to distinguish Bonhoeffer the theologian from any caricature or legendary misconceptions of him. Firstly, there is a direct focus on Bonhoeffer's writings and use of structures and language that parallel his own. At times, this includes quoting at length from Bonhoeffer's works.

Secondly, as already mentioned several times, this dissertation relies heavily on secondary sources that are considered most authoritative in the field; that is, they offer the most comprehensive and genuine representations and interpretations of Bonhoeffer's work. This includes, most prominently, contemporary Protestant scholars Clifford Green, Victoria

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56. Barnett, "Bonhoeffer Legacy as Work-in-Progress," 96–97.

57. Ericksen, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer in History," 129.

Barnett, Samuel Wells, and Florian Schmitz. One of the significant secondary resources I engage closely is a collection of essays edited by Clifford Green and Guy Carter titled *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*. This volume represents the publication of a series of lectures presented in 2011 at a conference titled "Bonhoeffer for the Coming Generations,"[58] the focus of which was to communicate the state of Bonhoeffer scholarship today and which was scheduled to coincide with the completion of DBWE. Along with Bethge's comprehensive biographing of Bonhoeffer,[59] this publication will serve as the authoritative source for leading Bonhoeffer scholarship today.[60]

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58. This conference was held as part of an annual conference series called the "Bonhoeffer Lectures in Public Ethics." Conferences are held in alternate years in Germany and North America and always include scholars from both locations. The 2011 conference was held at Union Theology Seminary, which hosts the Bonhoeffer Chair in Theology and Ethics (currently held by Clifford J. Green).

59. Among leading Bonhoeffer scholars, Eberhard Bethge is considered the primary and foundational authority on Bonhoeffer, including interpretation of his work and his biography. His most prominent publication is *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, which remains the definitive work on the subject. For a more detailed explanation of Bethge's role in Bonhoeffer's life and his legacy see Barnett, "The Bonhoeffer Legacy as Work-in-Progress," 98–99.

60. This dissertation will also make reference to presentations given by many Bonhoeffer scholars at a series of lectures offered during an annual conference on Bonhoeffer that I attended in April 2017 at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Additionally, because my dissertation explicitly seeks an English (and American) reception of Bonhoeffer, I will primarily engage English versions and translations of both primary and secondary sources. Although Bonhoeffer himself wrote in German, and a number of authoritative Bonhoeffer scholars are German, I do not think that engaging primarily with English language scholarship will limit the scope of my understanding of Bonhoeffer's legacy. Many of the Bonhoeffer scholars on which I will rely for authoritative secondary scholarship (e.g., contributors to Green and Carter's edited volume *Interpreting Bonhoeffer* and/or speakers at the 2017 Bonhoeffer lectures) are themselves leading German theologians, including Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Hartmut Lehmann, Wolfgang Huber, Hans Pfeifer, and Brigitte Kahl. Because of the increasing interest in Bonhoeffer in contexts outside of Germany (especially Britain and other Western European nations, South Africa, Japan, and the United States) significant work from these theologians exists in English already. Furthermore, the completion of DBWE signals an important moment for Bonhoeffer scholarship by making all of Bonhoeffer's work, along with the critical reflections of leading Bonhoeffer scholars, available in English. Also, this does not preclude engagement with German language scholarship as may prove necessary in my research going forward; it simply means that I do not intend to draw heavily from German language scholarship in this dissertation.

Thirdly, congruent with the method of these scholars, the analysis of Bonhoeffer's work presented in this dissertation dialogues closely with the historical and theological context of his time. This approach is especially important because it is the approach that Bonhoeffer himself espoused. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer asserts that concrete ethical problems define his generation, making theoretical and abstract approaches to ethics impossible.[61] He explains, "This leads us away from any kind of abstract ethic and towards an ethic which is entirely concrete. What can and must be said is not what is good once and for all, but the way in which Christ takes form among us here and now."[62]

## Organization

Although the writing style used in this dissertation is unconventional, the chapters are organized in a uniform way in order to provide organization and structure to the content.[63] Each chapter (for chapters 2–4) will begin with Section A, which presents relevant ideas to the main theological content of the chapter. Section A of each chapter is largely an interdisciplinary dialogue among scholars whose work is interconnected with the development of theology. The aim of this section is to contextualize the theological analysis that follows. By setting the stage for the theological analysis of the chapter, this first section follows the intentional approach of engaging Bonhoeffer's work in dialogue with the historical and theological context of his time.

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61. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, German edition ed. Ilse Tödt et al., English edition ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, DBWE 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 76.

62. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, *DBWE 6:*99.

63. Chapter 1, as the literature review chapter, varies slightly from the prescribed pattern for the rest of the chapters. A detailed explanation of how chapter 1 is organized can be found above in the section titled "Research Process: Literature Review and Selection of Dialogue Partners."

Section A of each chapter reflects a purposeful weaving together of many voices that aims to trace a history of relevant ideas through the interconnected snippets or fragments of the works of several scholars. This is done to show the consistency and connectedness of the development of ideas across disciplines. More than just a way to organize many sources, I envision this approach as a new way of constructing meaningful organization out of fragmented systems of theology. Contextualizing ideas in this way speaks directly to much of what was on Bonhoeffer's mind at the time of his later writings (*Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*), as he was constantly concerned with developing a theological ethics that could contribute meaningfully to rebuilding German culture after the war.

Section A of each chapter also weaves many perspectives together to reflect the reality that no one theologian, scholar, or discipline has all the answers. Rather, it is the interconnectedness and the *process of connecting* that provides significant insights into the workings of the Christian God in history. This approach honors the radically incarnational Christology of Bonhoeffer himself and it reflects my own belief that theology should be a communal endeavor, congruent with the communal nature of the triune God and the living body of Christ (i.e. the Church). In the past, systematic theology has talked about the theologian "on their knees." I want to talk about the theologian "in relationship" reflective of the Trinity. If it is God's very nature to be in relationship, then the fulfillment of human knowledge, truth, and wisdom must also be found in relationship.

The second section of each chapter (section B) will build on the dialogue started in section A to engage directly with Bonhoeffer's works and his life. Therefore, section B will be more focused on singular voices, placing Bonhoeffer in intimate dialogue with one or two Catholic theologians. Secondary sources will be used in these sections as needed to clarify

aspects of Bonhoeffer's work and biography. The final section of each chapter (section C) will answer the question of: what does this mean for Catholics in the U.S. today?

# CHAPTER 1

# THE POLITICS OF CITING DIETRICH BONHOEFFER AMONG CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL THINKERS

> One could argue that [Bonhoeffer] is simultaneously the most quoted and the most misinterpreted Christian theologian of the twentieth century.[1]

Prominent Protestant Bonhoeffer scholars Clifford Green and Guy Carter intend the quote above as a critique of mainstream Christian theology and other popular publications about Bonhoeffer in general. However, even a cursory survey of the work of Catholic theologians reveals that misinterpretations of Bonhoeffer's theology have been particularly common among them. Nevertheless, a comprehensive and properly nuanced account of the Catholic reception of Bonhoeffer is notably lacking in the vast secondary literature that exists about Bonhoeffer.

To begin addressing this gap in Bonhoeffer scholarship, this chapter catalogues various references to Bonhoeffer by Catholic theological thinkers. I will offer several overall observations about how Bonhoeffer is used by Catholic scholars and why his work is vulnerable to misuse and misinterpretation. Summarily, these critiques can be stated as the failure of Catholic theologians to consider Bonhoeffer's legacy when quoting him or referring to his ideas.[2] In failing to do so, Catholic theologians have unwittingly bypassed a cogent

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1. Green and Carter, *Interpreting Bonhoeffer*, xi.

2. "Bonhoeffer's legacy," as explained in the Introduction refers to points of agreement presented by leading Protestant Bonhoeffer scholars who have done extensive scholarship on

dialogue partner in formulating relevant responses to challenges currently facing the Church in the United States.[3]

## Chapter Organization

As explained in the Introduction, Catholic scholars reviewed in this chapter are referenced only briefly and my engagements with them are solely focused on their use of Bonhoeffer and his works. My comments are in no way meant to be a full representation of any one thinker. Because citing Bonhoeffer is so common in Catholic theological publications, it is necessary to be selective about the specific examples discussed in this chapter. In some cases, further information about the research that is summarized herewith is provided in footnotes. However, in many instances, citations of Bonhoeffer are so superficial that it provides little with which to mention in a literature review.

Specific selections for inclusion in this chapter started with a wide-ranging investigation into Catholic authors for references of Bonhoeffer.[4] From this expansive research, authors who engaged with Bonhoeffer multiple times and/or that ostensibly had

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Bonhoeffer which considers the full scope of his works, his biography, the historical and theological context of his work, and authoritative secondary sources.

3. See Introduction above, especially the section titled "A Theology of Fragmentation," for an overview of current challenges facing the Church in the United States.

4. This research was initiated by compiling a list of as many Catholic theologians as possible who have published since Bonhoeffer. I was aided by the creation and vetting of this list by my dissertation director. Using the list as a guide, I then researched (online and in print) dozens of Catholic theologians (and similar thinkers) to chronicle their references to Bonhoeffer. This research produced roughly 100 pages of notes. There were no purposeful inclusions or exclusions of certain theological voices. I wanted to present as wide a spectrum as possible of Catholic theological thinkers who engage Bonhoeffer. In the Introduction, I briefly mentioned Pope Francis to make a point that Bonhoeffer is so popular among Catholic thinkers that even the Pope can mention him in passing as if he is common knowledge in Catholic theological and faith circles. I treated other popes as I did all other Catholic theologians that I investigated and included what seemed connected.

meaningful engagements with his work became the focus of further scrutiny.[5] Final decision for inclusion in the chapter was based on scholars whose usage of Bonhoeffer converged in such a way that a natural dialogue emerged in writing.

Chapter 1, like all chapters in this dissertation, is designed to be a dialogue among theologians which accounts for the narrative framework that structures the following analysis (rather than a more traditional topical presentation). This chapter is also organized narratively deliberately to mimic Bonhoeffer's own work, especially his later published works, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, which portray profound theology as worked out through correspondence between Bonhoeffer and his closest friends and family.

My own preferred writing style[6] is intentionally non-traditional, employing a presentation method that is meant to push back against conventional structures of theological scholarship. In this chapter I prioritize a dialectical structure over a topical organization of ideas. Therefore, I place theologians and ideas in discussion based on connections I've made between them, particularly connections made in their usage of Bonhoeffer and/or their contextualization of Bonhoeffer or a theological concept. This method of writing was based on meticulous research and shares with more conventional writing methods the goal of presenting valid scholarship and new ideas that can dialogue respectfully and meaningfully with traditional systematics. However, the writing is meant to simulate a conversation between theologians as much as it is meant to create dialogue

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5. On the recommendation of my dissertation director, I worked through these notes systematically by taking one theologian at a time and analyzing each of their engagements with Bonhoeffer. In this process, I wrote a brief summary for each individual theologian's usage of Bonhoeffer.

6. The Introduction provides a detailed explanation of my writing style.

between the author and the reader. Therefore, in some sections I weave multiple voices together in a conversational way rather than present one thinker at a time.

## Opening Observations

Bonhoeffer has widespread credibility in the theological community because he was an early and unwavering voice in resistance to Naziism—a political movement now, in retrospect, condemned by all Christian communities for its role is bringing about the Shoah, among other atrocities committed. Unfortunately, this universal credibility, and the fact the Bonhoeffer gave his life in the fight against Naziism leaving his writings to speak for themself, makes his work vulnerable to misappropriation. I will show in this chapter that some Catholic theologians have misappropriated fragments of Bonhoeffer's work to advance their own theological projects, especially pointing to instances where the theology supported resonates with neoorthodoxy, which has historically been linked with neoliberal conservative Christian contemporary theology. I argue that to protect against these forms of misappropriation, popular fragments of Bonhoeffer's work must be appreciated in the full context of his theology, a body of work which includes significant developments over time. Catholic theologian Walter Kasper points out that Christian theology did not reflect the influence of Bonhoeffer's work until the 1960s.[7] Kasper attributes the noticeable increase in reference to Bonhoeffer among theologians after this time to Bishop John A. T. Robinson's

7. Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, new ed. (London: Continuum, 2012), 59–60. Ted Mark Schoof, O.P., makes the same point. See his introduction to *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism*, by Edward Schillebeeckx, vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Ted Mark Schoof and Carl Sterkens (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), xv.

publication *Honest to God*. Kasper explains that Bonhoeffer's influence at the time seemed "extensive, although unfortunately often quite superficial."[8]

A contemporary review of the Catholic reception of Bonhoeffer reveals that Kasper's assertion is still true today. Therefore, the first critique offered in this chapter is a general observation that Catholic theologians tend to make passing and superficial references to Bonhoeffer and his ideas. This is evidenced by two tendencies within the works of Catholic theologians when referencing Bonhoeffer.

Firstly, many Catholic theologians will mention Bonhoeffer's name or repeat a brief quote, phrase, or term of Bonhoeffer's without engaging any further with his theology. As already mentioned, there is little to respond to in these cases because of the perfunctory and uncritical nature of the references. Although these cursory references to Bonhoeffer were considered when drawing conclusions about the observations and critiques offered in this chapter, most are not engaged much in the dialogue of the chapter.

The second overall tendency of Catholic theologians can be observed most keenly in what ostensibly appear to be more substantial engagements with Bonhoeffer's theology. In these cases, Catholic theologians present a deeper engagement or analytical reflection of Bonhoeffer's ideas. However, even among these examples, there is a tendency to misinterpret and misrepresent Bonhoeffer's ideas. This chapter dialogues chiefly with examples from instances such as this, where references to Bonhoeffer seem substantial, but when considered critically and in comparison to Bonhoeffer's legacy, are shown to lack scope and depth in authentically reflecting Bonhoeffer's theology.

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8. Kasper, *God of Jesus Christ*, 59–60.

The lack of meaningful engagement with Bonhoeffer causes many Catholic theologians to use his ideas as props in their theological claims and systematic projects at the expense of seriously considering his own unique and significant contributions. This limits the possibilities of uncovering the full potential of Bonhoeffer's work for contemporary Catholic theology.

As I noted before, Richard McBrien's incorporation of Bonhoeffer's ideas into several sections of his *Catholicism* does represent the most comprehensive attempt to catalogue Bonhoeffer's relation to and influence on Catholic theology.[9] Yet his work simply remains a starting point for what is needed: a thorough cataloguing and critical examination of references made to Bonhoeffer in Catholic theology. The time is ripe for such an undertaking because, as Green and Carter have pointed out,

> that everything is now in English[10] makes it not only possible, but also necessary, that we read Bonhoeffer the man and Bonhoeffer the theologian *whole*.[11] The time is past when one could credibly extrapolate a theology from a few phrases plucked from his provocative *Letters and Papers in Prison*. No longer can one tear a few sentences from their historical and intellectual context to deploy in an argument about a contemporary war or some other contested ethical or political issue.[12] Nor is it legitimate to project the preferences or prejudices of compering religious parties onto Bonhoeffer by interpreting all of his theology through one of his influential books, *Discipleship*, for example, or his prison letters and *Ethics*. Respect of the man, respect

9. See the introduction, especially note 14.

10. Referring to the full series of Bonhoeffer's work being published in English as Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (= DBWE).

11. Emphasis is theirs.

12. This is, of course, an important point to make not only about Bonhoeffer, but also it will be a crucial point for me to keep in mind for all authors and thinkers cited throughout this dissertation. And, it is a point that must be taken seriously for any theology of fragmentation.

> for the truth, and responsibility to future generations require more patience, more honesty, and more effort to truly understand the legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.[13]

## Cheap Engagements: Bonhoeffer as a Theological Prop

Although Bonhoeffer himself was not a systematician, at least insofar as he did not produce a systematics,[14] Catholic theologians have often tried to fit Bonhoeffer into their own theological systems. Using Bonhoeffer's ideas and writings to support their own theses, these theologians rely on the authority of Bonhoeffer while ignoring Bonhoeffer's own theological developments and complexities.

Whether the authority being leveraged is Bonhoeffer the neo-orthodox theologian, Bonhoeffer the martyr, or Bonhoeffer the "secularist," (among several other characterizations bestowed on Bonhoeffer), Bonhoeffer's writings and life have a valid authority among twentieth-century Catholic theologians. The greatest evidence of this reality is the fact that many leading Catholic scholars refer to or quote Bonhoeffer in publications and remarks that are directed at not only the academic Catholic community, but also, in some instances the ecclesial and lay communities of believers, such as is the case when mentioned in Papal documents or speeches.[15] For example, during his third pastoral visit to Germany in 1996,

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13. Green and Carter, *Interpreting Bonhoeffer*, xi.

14. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 497.

15. Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis have all referred to Bonhoeffer in remarks or promulgations. I mention these Popes to make the point that Bonhoeffer is so well known in Catholic circles that even the leader of the Roman Catholic Church can reference him to the Catholic faithful without needing to explain who he was or his significance to Christianity. I also look at the Popes in their capacity as Catholic theologians in their own right, alongside other Catholic theological thinkers.

Pope John Paul II named Bonhoeffer as praiseworthy along with other "heroic" Protestants and Catholics whose actions provide good examples of a "common witness."[16]

From references such as this it can be implied that Catholic theologians generally assume that readers (theologians, clergy, and educated Catholics) will recognize Bonhoeffer's name and possibly already know some basic biographical information (such as his German and Lutheran identities, opposition to Nazism, and subsequent martyrdom). This is the case because Bonhoeffer is often mentioned by name without any accompanying explanation, indicating that there is at least some sense of common knowledge of Bonhoeffer among Catholics. His role as Christian martyr at the hands of Nazism is thereby uplifted to the detriment of his theological insight.

Similarly, popular fragments of Bonhoeffer's thought are also often referred to as if they are common knowledge in the Catholic theological community, including Bonhoeffer's distinction between costly and cheap grace, his concept of a "religionless Christianity" and his description of a "world come of age." In many cases, Bonhoeffer's most popular ideas are mentioned without an explanation, as if the ideas are self-explanatory. Some Catholic theologians make frequent reference to Bonhoeffer or to several of his ideas and publications without explaining their relationship to each other or the rest of his theology.

While it may be common practice for Catholic systematic theologians to make cursory reference to fragments of thought among other Catholic systematicians, this cannot be done as easily with Bonhoeffer's works. As already pointed out, Bonhoeffer's publications cannot

16. John Paul II, *A Pilgrim Pope: Messages for the World*, ed. Achille Silvestrini with Jerome M. Vereb (Kansas City, KS: Andrews McMeel, 1999), 281.

be considered a systematic project comparable to his Catholic contemporaries. Therefore, although it may be the case that one portion of a theological systematics can be considered consistent with all other portions, this is not true for Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer's theology is not only itself fragmented, but also his ideas underwent significant transitions over time. It is this fragmented nature of Bonhoeffer's works that makes his theology an excellent sample from which to build a constructive theology of fragmentation. It is precisely because of this tendency of twentieth-century Catholic theologians to try to fit Bonhoeffer into Christian systems that often causes them to fail to understand the full breadth, profound uniqueness, and timeless truth of Bonhoeffer's theology.[17]

Since Bonhoeffer's theology is not a systematic project, reference to his ideas falls flat when they are not explained in context. Furthermore, reference to different ideas and different publications can erroneously imply the existence of an obvious overall sense of cohesion or consistency through Bonhoeffer's work. Although there are instances of cohesion and consistency throughout Bonhoeffer's work, it is not something that can be assumed as obvious the way it can be assumed in a more formal work of systematics. However, Catholic theologians often fail to acknowledge this, sampling from his various works as they would from any other systematic theologian.

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17. Briefly stated, there are two reasons that Bonhoeffer cannot fit easily into existing systems of Catholic theology: (1) one could reasonably argue that traditional Christian systems are failing in the wake of the atrocities of the early twentieth century, the sex and abuse scandals of the early twenty-first century, and most specifically to the contemporary U.S. setting, the failure of the Church to diffuse the political polarization of Christian issues; (2) theologies of fragmentation, such as Bonhoeffer's, do not lend themselves easily to "fitting in" because, similar to liberation and queer theologies, they embrace ambiguity in a way that threatens traditional systems. Therein lies the power of a theology of fragmentation to challenge the status quos of a Catholic theology that has failed to speak meaningfully to the contemporary social political setting of the United States.

For example, in *The Spirit of God*, Yves Congar sardonically quotes from a poem included in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* which he thinks represents well a "dualist vision" and "contempt for the world" that is at the root of a type of Christian asceticism that Congar is critiquing.[18] In the same publication, Congar makes passing reference to "costly grace," an idea from Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship*.[19] These are only a couple examples of how Congar engages different ideas from various Bonhoeffer publications without providing any further information, context, or explanation.[20]

Congar is one among many early twentieth-century Catholic theologians who appeal to Bonhoeffer and his popular ideas to support their own theological claims. The most interesting of these citations is when Bonhoeffer is supplied to make a specifically *Catholic* argument. For example, in Hans Urs von Balthasar's *In the Fullness of Faith*, a book dedicated to Balthasar's arguments for how and why the Roman Catholic Church is not only distinctive

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18. Congar writes, "Who will challenge the testimony of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a person who was both virtuous and clear-sighted? This is what he said: If you set out in search of freedom, first learn to discipline your senses and your soul, so that your cravings and your body do not lead you astray. May your mind and your flesh be pure, completely under your control, and may they, obedient to you, seek the end which has been assigned to them. No one fathoms the mystery of freedom except through discipline" (Yves Congar, *The Spirit of God: Short Writings on the Holy Spirit*, ed. Susan Mader Brown, Mark E. Ginter, and Joseph G. Mueller, trans. Susan Mader Brown et al. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 26). Congar's notes cite "text printed at the beginning" of Bonhoeffer's *Ethik* (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1949, 5). In a later section of *The Spirit of God*, Congar again quotes the same excerpt from *Ethik* to support his argument that "freedom is judged by its fruits" (84).

19. Congar, *Spirit of God*, 159. Congar also makes passing reference to "the price of grace" in Yves Congar, *The River of the Water of Life* (*Rev 22:1*) *Flows in the East and the West*, vol. 2 of *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983), 150.

20. Other publications of Congar that cite Bonhoeffer and his ideas are included in the bibliography.

among other Christian groups, but also the most authentic expression of Christian truth, Balthasar quotes Bonhoeffer several times.[21]

In the beginning chapter of the book, titled "Catholic," and following sections that argue that Jesus is Catholic, God's love is Catholic, and Jesus' cross is the center of the Catholic reality, Balthasar quotes from Bonhoeffer's dissertation *Sanctorum Communio*.[22] What is immediately striking about this reference to Bonhoeffer is Balthasar's failure to identify Bonhoeffer as a Lutheran (i.e. non-Catholic) theologian while using his writing to further an argument about how and why Catholicism in particular is distinctive and superior to other Christian groups.

Furthermore, Balthasar goes on to discuss Bonhoeffer's quote in terms of Christ's suffering on the cross.[23] However, in the excerpt that Balthasar quotes here, Bonhoeffer's

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21. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *In the Fullness of Fatih: On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

22. The quote Balthasar uses is this, "This means that struggle is recognized to be a fundamental sociological principle; in principle it is hallowed. In concrete terms this acknowledges the necessity and rightness of party interests in every community relationship. It is only in the clash of wills that life springs forth; only in struggle does strength unfold" (Balthasar, *Fullness of Fatih*).

23. In the *Fullness of Faith*, Balthasar writes, "If this were the final law of creaturely society, the fundamental (Catholic) law for amicable human relations would be the Hobbesian struggle of all against all. Thus Kant: 'Man desires peace and unity, but Nature knows better; it knows what is good for his species. Nature desires strife.' Nietzsche speaks in similar terms. Christ's cross must also encompass these 'hallowed party interests' if it is to give rise to an authentic catholicity in the world. But this means that the attitude Christ adopts in his suffering must have transcended every possible contradiction, all possible clashes, every particular claim to be in the right. It is not enough for him to utter a commandment of reconciliation (anyone could do that): he must create a context in which every particular standpoint with its unqualified, particular right (and wrong) is embedded right from the outset in the all-embracing Catholic reality. This 'dividing wall,' too, is to be 'thrown down.' Take note: the 'hallowed' particularity and opposition of wills, arising from the creation, is not suspended in the Catholica. Thus Paul is right at the heart of disputes in his communities. But there is a Catholic way (on the basis of the cross) of reconciling these standpoints in 'the peace of God which passes all understanding' (Phil 4:7). In his wrestling with the Corinthians, for instance, Paul works toward reconciliation with all his strength. Ultimately, however, all he can do is point and testify to the reconciliation that has already taken place in Christ's cross. Why the cross? For God in his absolute

point, as is evident in *Sanctorum Communio*, was not about Christ or his cross.[24] Rather, in the section quoted from *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer was presenting a dialogue with sociology about the essential nature of humanity being one of sociality. In its original context in *Sanctorum Communio* this quote supports Bonhoeffer's claim that humans only become fully human, thus fully free, in relationship to other humans, and that this reality is essentially both a ramification of free will and the intention of *imago dei*.[25] However, Balthasar's use of the quote seems to miss (or ignore) this central insight from *Sanctorum Communio*.

In a later chapter of *In the Fullness of Faith* titled "The Communion of Saints," Balthasar begins by quoting Martin Luther and asserts that Luther "exquisitely" describes the true meaning of *communio* in the Catholic sense. Balthasar explains, however, that because of

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wisdom there is nothing remarkable, so to speak, in transcending all particular and conflicting standpoints and ascertaining the share of the right that each has. But Jesus, as man, cannot play the part of the great sage, loftily superior to all standpoints. He must endure their clash; and the resulting suffering is itself the expression of the most active readiness on his part his part to step in, according to the Father's will, on behalf of every individual. In this way he does not overcome the particular from outside, but, acknowledging what is relatively valid in it, leads it beyond itself from within."

24. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens translate the quote in this manner, "This means, however, that strife [Kampf] is recognized as a fundamental sociological law and basically is sanctified. Concretely, this implies the necessity and the justification of partisanship is every community relation. Genuine life arises only in the conflict of wills; strength unfolds only in strife. This is an old insight" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, German edition ed. Joachim von Soosten, English edition ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, DBWE 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 84–85). Clifford J. Green, the volume's editor, notes that the word "ancient" was used here in this edition of the text, in place of the word for "old," which is the word Bonhoeffer used is his original dissertation version of this text. This note is significant because it offers a better perspective on the point Bonhoeffer is trying to make here, which is that sociality as the essential nature of humanity is an ancient (that is, not merely a pre-modern (i.e. Hobbesian or Kantian)) insight (85 n. 83).

25. For a detailed discussion of Bonhoeffer's understanding of sociality from *Sanctorum Communio*, see Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

Luther and the Reformation, the "body of Christ" has lost this true meaning in the Lutheran Church. Balthasar quotes Bonhoeffer here to support this argument against Luther and explain how it is that the true Catholic sense of the "*Communio Sanctorum*" was lost.[26]

Also in *Fullness of Faith*, in the subsection, "Rooted in Christ," Balthasar calls on Bonhoeffer again, this time appealing to his concept of "representative action" in a discussion about the effectiveness of moral actions.[27] Here Balthasar argues that Bonhoeffer's concept of representative action (i.e. taking good moral action on behalf of or for the sake of others) is only effective because of Christ. Balthasar argues, therefore, that representative action is only effective in and through the Catholic community, which is the true body of Christ. Interestingly, Balthasar gives no citation for this reference to Bonhoeffer, although it is safe

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26. Balthasar, *Fullness of Fatih*.

27. Balthasar. In the text, Balthasar gives no citation for this reference to Bonhoeffer. However, Bonhoeffer addresses the "representative action" of Christ in *Sanctorum Communio*, *Act and Being*, and *Ethics*. Since Balthasar also refers in this section to the translation of "*Communio Sanctorum*" [sic], it seems likely that he is continuing to reference the same text here. The full quote is as follows, "The very fact that the original meaning of the *Communio Sanctorum* is 'communion in holy things,' i.e., first and foremost in the Eucharist—the bread we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ?' (1 Cor 10:16)—shows us that the members of the mystical Body do not exchange their so-called 'merits' in an arbitrary way: their sharing of goods is based on the fact that they are all rooted in Christ. (Among Christians, at least, the external sharing of alms and other corporal works of mercy takes place in the Spirit of Christ and in thankful remembrance of him.) … This explains something that at first seems very strange, namely, that only in Christianity does the good prove fruitful above and beyond the individual.… The idea of representative action or suffering on someone's behalf, as Bonhoeffer rightly says, rests on an offer on God's part and therefore 'applies only in Christ and his community. It is not an ethical possibility: it is a theological concept.' He goes on to say that, while there may be 'an ethical concept of representation,' that is, 'the freewill acceptance of an evil on behalf of someone else,' such action neither 'penetrates to the other person's responsibility for himself' nor does the latter 'commit his whole ethical person, but only as much as he owes to the agent who has acted on his behalf.' In the 'communion of the saints' these bounds are overstepped and people's intimate personal areas are affected: this is only possible in and through Christ. The 'merit,' therefore, is exclusively at Christ's service, although, in handing it over, the Christian may link it with some quite specific request or intention. Everything passes through Christ's and God's freedom, and this prevents any direct experience—let alone calculation—of cause and effect. Such experience may be given from time to time, in an inchoate form, as a brief lifting of a curtain that is normally closed."

to assume he is still quoting from *Sanctorum Communio*.[28] Outside of using Bonhoeffer's words and ideas as props to support his own arguments about Catholicism, Balthasar fails to engage Bonhoeffer's thought. This is especially significant given the fact that Bonhoeffer's ideas about the Christian community and ethical action develop over time and in relationship with his specific historical context.

The lack of dialogue with historical context is most significant in the final example above, where Bonhoeffer's concept of representative action is involved. In that instance, Balthasar used Bonhoeffer to support his argument that only through true communion with Christ (i.e. only in a specifically Catholic Christian setting) can actions taken on behalf of others have real effect; For reality itself is made possible through the body of Christ in whom all Christians actively take part. Using Bonhoeffer in particular here provokes several questions, including: Was Bonhoeffer's original intent to make such a statement about the exclusivity of action in Christ?[29] Furthermore: Is it valid to take any discussion of ethics, responsibility, and collective evil from the works of a World War II German theologian and use them to support a universal interpretation of Christianity without mentioning the context in which the ideas were developed?[30] Finally: Would Bonhoeffer have applied

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28. Balthasar.

29. It is possible that Bonhoeffer's original statements were undergirded by his incarnational emphasis; however, such a reading could only be concluded with knowledge of his later writings in *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*, to which Balthasar makes no reference.

30. Green and Carter answer this question in *Interpreting Bonhoeffer*, "It is probably possible to understand, appreciate, and interpret the systems of some theologians relatively independently of their historical circumstances.… Not so with Bonhoeffer, for much of his theology and ethics was forged in engagement with theological antagonists in the church as well as with the doctrines and policies of Nazi politics. Yet Bonhoeffer's theology is not an epiphenomenon of the church struggle and resistance to Nazism. A thinker of the first order, whose often subtle intellectual decisions and

an exclusively Christian location to his idea of representative action? The answer to this question must dialogue with his writings in *Letters and Papers from Prison* which reflect his experiences from prison where he personally encountered suffering of Jewish people.

Balthasar makes several other references to Bonhoeffer in *Fullness of Faith* and several other publications, but the examples above display that overall Balthasar's engagement of Bonhoeffer's work is superficial, using Bonhoeffer as a prop for his own theological assertions. Balthasar is not alone is this. Henri de Lubac is another example of a Catholic theologian who similarly engages only superficially with Bonhoeffer to support specifically Catholic claims.

In *The Church*[31] de Lubac presents, in his own words, "a marginal gloss on the Second Vatican Council," specifically *Lumen Gentium*, and writes in the spirit of "renewal of the [Catholic] church."[32] Among other references to Bonhoeffer in this text,[33] in chapter 2, titled "How Is The Church Mystery?," de Lubac quotes from an address Bonhoeffer gave in Czechoslovakia in 1932 on the topic "A Theological Basis for the World Alliance."[34] De Lubac's

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distinctions are overlooked by fascination with the drama of his life, his theological and ethical thinking must be examined in its own integrity" (xiii).

31. Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne (Staten Island, NY: Ecclesia, 1969).

32. De Lubac, preface to *The Church*, vii.

33. De Lubac, *The Church*, 24, 35, 85, 87, 91.

34. The full quote is as follows, "The Church is a mysterious extension in time of the Trinity, not only preparing us for the life of unity but bringing about even now our participation in it.… She is 'the Incarnation continued.' She is, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer used to say, 'the presence of Christ on earth, the *Christus praesens*,' she speaks with 'the authority of Christ living and present in her'" (De Lubac, 24, quoting from René Marlé, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Témoin de Jésus-Christ parmi ses frères* (Paris: Castermann, 1967), 51). A. James Reimer also employes this quote in his chapter "Theologians in Nazi Germany" (in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum (Maryknoll, NY:

use of Bonhoeffer here does evidence a more substantive engagement with Bonhoeffer's ideas, as he cites not only from an anthology of Bonhoeffer's writings, but also a secondary source.[35] However, the most interesting thing about how de Lubac quotes Bonhoeffer here is not the specific content of the quote or de Lubac's text, but the fact that, like Balthasar, de Lubac uses Bonhoeffer to clarify a point specific to the Catholic Church without identifying Bonhoeffer as Lutheran.[36]

De Lubac also quotes from *Sanctorum Communio* later in *The Church* to reinforce his argument that the Catholic Church is the incarnation of Christ in concrete reality and here he does identify Bonhoeffer as a Lutheran theologian.[37] This indicates that de Lubac knew that

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Orbis, 1999)). In his citation of the quote (p. 75, n. 32), Reimer explains that it came from "a speech [Bonhoeffer] gave at the ecumenical Youth Conference in Czechoslovakia on July 26, 1932."

35. De Lubac cites from René Marlé, a French Catholic priest who published on Bonhoeffer. It is significant that de Lubac engages with secondary literature on Bonhoeffer, however, he does not cite any Protestant/Lutheran secondary sources.

36. De Lubac, *Church*, 23–24. Just prior to this within the same paragraph, de Lubac makes it clear that he is specifically talking about the Catholic Church, " 'In the long run,' Newman wrote, 'we shall discover one of two things: either that the Catholic Church is really and effectively the invisible world come to the earth or that our beliefs about our origins and our destiny are sheer fantasy.' " De Lubac cites (incompletely and imprecisely) Newman's "*Discourses to Mixed Congregations*, p. 282" (24 n. 31); however, the quote is in fact a somewhat garbled translation that has gone from English to French and then back into English. The original quote is "on the long run it will be found that either the Catholic Religion is verily and indeed the coming in of the unseen world into this, or that there is nothing positive, nothing dogmatic, nothing real in any of our notions as to whence we come and whither we are going" (John Henry Newman, *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (Boston, 1853), 210).

37. "Not so long ago a Lutheran writer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, forcefully recalled as much. Following the 'ancient Church,' whose sturdy scriptural exegesis he praises, Bonhoeffer believes that if one is a Christian 'it is not in an invisible Church that one believes, the kingdom of God considered *coetus electorum*; we believe that God has made of the empirical, concrete Church-in which is exercised the ministry of word and sacrament-his community; we believe that this Church is the body of Christ, that is, the presence of Christ in the world; we believe, as we have been promised, that the Spirit of God acts in her' " (de Lubac, *Church*, 35). De Lubac's source is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: Eine dogmatische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der Kirche*, new ed. (Munich: Christian Kaiser 1954), 210. In this instance, we have an English translation of a French translation of a German original.

Bonhoeffer was not Catholic but used his work anyway. Assuming Balthasar also knew that Bonhoeffer was not Catholic raises the question of whether the original author's intended audience or the church to which the original author was referring matters when quoting another theologian. In the case of Bonhoeffer, both the intended audience and referent of his writings about the "church" would have been the German Lutheran and/or Confessing Churches, or Christianity worldwide in the case of his later ecumenical writings.

More concretely stated, the question raised here is whether it is theologically and academically valid to use statements made about the German Confessing Church to support claims being made for the universal Catholic Church. It would at least be prudent to take some time in the publication to acknowledge the differences between these two churches. This question is closely related to the relevance of context in theology, which is a central theme in this dissertation and Bonhoeffer's theology.

Congar, Balthasar, and de Lubac are also good examples of early twentieth-century Catholic theologians who tend to engage more fully with Bonhoeffer's earlier concepts, while making only superficial reference to his later publications and ideas. They favor the early neo-orthodox Barthian Bonhoeffer because it suits the theology they wish to formulate and express.

Theologians who cite from Bonhoeffer's earlier works[38] without mentioning his later works tend to emphasize Bonhoeffer's neo-orthodox theology, his relationship to Karl Barth and similarities in their ideas, such as their high Christologies, two-realm thinking, and distinction between faith and reason. These Catholic theologians tend to diminish Bonhoeffer's earlier work as simply an example of the Protestant tendency toward dualisms.

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38. Most especially *Sactorum Communio*, *Act and Being*, and *Life Together*.

In *The Theology of Karl Barth*, Balthasar refers to Bonhoeffer's high Christology in order to explain Barth's understanding of the body of the Christ. Explaining Barth's assertion that human beings are "true partakers" in the body of Christ and in the divine nature, Balthasar points out that Bonhoeffer understood Barth's point when he wrote *Act and Being* (1931), where Bonhoeffer tried to unify "a theology of actualism with a theology of being-in-Christ, that is, an ontology of the Church."[39]

References such as this are meaningful on the counts that Bonhoeffer was a self-proclaimed disciple of Barth early in his career, and Bonhoeffer's work does have a Christological focus throughout his life. However, here as in other references to Bonhoeffer, Balthasar fails to acknowledge that there were significant transitions in Bonhoeffer's thought and how those transitions shifted Bonhoeffer's agreement (to eventual disagreement) with Barth's theology. Thus, Balthasar meaningfully engaged the high Christological grounding of Bonhoeffer's theology from his earlier works, however Bonhoeffer's later works took a more anthropocentric, incarnational, and ethical approach.

Not unlike Congar, Balthasar, and de Lubac, Catholic writer Francis Collins uses Bonhoeffer to support his apologetics. However, different from his predecessors, when Collins references Bonhoeffer, it is in support of arguments pertaining to Christian belief in

39. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Drury (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 365.

general.[40] For example, Collins includes an excerpt from Bonhoeffer in his anthology *Belief*, which is a collection of writings that present "deeply rational arguments for faith."[41]

The section of this anthology where Collins includes an excerpt of Bonhoeffer's writing is on the theme of "Love and Forgiveness as Pointers to God."[42] In this section, Collins samples from *Discipleship* along with excerpts from Jewish writer Viktor Frankl and Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Collins also makes reference to Bonhoeffer in another apologetic treatise, titled *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*.[43] Here Collins applies a mystical sense to Bonhoeffer's experiences in a Nazi prison, using a quote from *Letters and Papers from Prison* as an example of someone who had an experience of God at the end of their life.[44] Although Collins does not explicitly misinterpret Bonhoeffer's concepts, he also does not provide any development of the themes or reference to Bonhoeffer's context and transitions of thought.

Similar to Collins, Mary Daly references Bonhoeffer in two of her seminal pieces of feminist theology, *Beyond God the Father* and *The Church and the Second Sex*.[45] In the

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40. Francis S. Collins, introduction to *Belief: Readings on the Reason for Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), vii. This is a collection of writings Collins compiled to address "the central and profound question" of the existence of God in which he explains that an answer to this question which appeals to faith alone without any appeal to reason or proof is and always has been unsatisfactory.

41. Collins, introduction to *Belief*, vii.

42. Collins, *Belief*, 251–270. For the excerpt from Bonhoeffer, Collins cites Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller with Irmgard Booth (London: SCM Press, 1959).

43. Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Present Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 47.

44. Collins, *Language of God*, 47.

45. In *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973; repr., 1985), see pp. 3, 19, 30, 70, 119. In *The Church and the Second Sex* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985),

former, Daly employes a quote from *Letters and Papers from Prison* where Bonhoeffer "insists that women should be subject to their husbands" as an example of misogynistic language from a specifically Protestant theologian.[46] Daly cites Bonhoeffer here to emphasize the expansiveness of sexism and patriarchy within Christian theology (not just Catholic theology). Like earlier twentieth-century Catholic thinkers, Daly mentions Bonhoeffer without providing any background information about who he was (other than the fact that he was Protestant) and mentions him alongside Karl Barth, who is easily the most recognizable Protestant theological figure of the early twentieth century. This is further evidence that Bonhoeffer is well known among educated Catholics.

Also, like her male counterparts, Daly does not offer any nuance in her representation of the overall arch and full scope of Bonhoeffer's thought. However, unlike most early twentieth-century Catholic theologians who tend to emphasize Bonhoeffer's earlier publications, Daly cites only from *Letters and Papers from Prison* and suggests that Bonhoeffer's work has a decisive slant toward progressiveness when she states that "Bonhoeffer…speaks against the 'the attack of Christianity on the adulthood of the world.'"[47] Daly's rhetorical construction here relies on an assumption that her reader will not only recognize, but also will resonant positively with a modernism or progressiveness of thought in Bonhoeffer. In this way, she can use Bonhoeffer to support her primary argument that

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see p. 137. Although Mary Daly is explicitly a post-Christian theologian, she was raised, educated, and spent her career in the Catholic tradition. Daly can be considered a "Catholic" theologian in the sense that her theology is an ongoing response to Catholicism.

46. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 3–4, 19. Daly's reference to Bonhoeffer is lifted from "A Wedding Sermon from a Prison Cell," in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1953; repr., 1966), 47.

47. Daly, 3.

patriarchal sexism is so intrinsic to Christianity that even a thinker as progressive and celebrated as Dietrich Bonhoeffer promotes misogynistic views about marital relations.[48]

Later in *Beyond God the Father*, Daly argues that theology must move "beyond Christolatry," again naming Bonhoeffer among other leading Protestant thinkers as having missed an opportunity to pave the way for such theological progression:

> It might indeed seem logical that the widely publicized phenomenon of "the death of God" would have entailed also a "death of Jesus" in the twentieth century, at least in the sense of transcending the Christian fixation upon the person of Jesus. Obviously, this did not happen within the mind-set of such Christologically oriented thinkers as Bultmann, Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Bonhoeffer.[49]

Although Daly's identification of the obvious sexism in Bonhoeffer's writing indeed provides an effective example of the now well-documented social sins and intrinsic evil of sexism, misogyny, and a patriarchal worldview within Christian theology, her charge of Christolatry against Bonhoeffer should be considered more substantively than Daly's merely cursory reference. Without discarding Daly's concept of Christolatry, which is insightful and poignant for Christian theology to consider, the charge of Christolatry levied at Bonhoeffer specifically needs more careful consideration.

Because the charge of idolatry rests in the argument that reverential emphasis on a certain object draws one's attention away from (versus toward) the true Christian God, an example of Christolatry must prove that the representation and emphasis on Christ in question has the same effect. Alternately, an emphasis on Christ that has the effect of drawing one closer to God must be acknowledged as an authentic and life-giving Christology.

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48. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 3.

49. Daly, 70.

Therefore, when considering Christolatry, it is important to identify exactly what about Christ the theologian emphasizes or sees as central and worth emulating. For example, by exclusively emphasizing the male form as the only possibility for Christ's authentic representation in creation, certain teachings of the institutional Church have inadvertently idolatrized Christ and the male body. This is true, for example, in theological arguments against the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church.

However, when other aspects of Christ are emphasized as the human incarnation of the Christian God it can be life-giving and instructional to the moral life. For example, Bonhoeffer emphasizes the essential goodness of the created world and immanence of God within it because of the incarnation of Christ. Through this Christological foundation, Bonhoeffer encourages a worldview that embraces an ethical way of life that takes seriously "conformation to Christ." Such a framework, where Christ serves as the ultimate example of how humans can be in right relationship with each other, with creation, and with God, may be guilty of idealization of Christ, but not idolization. However, to fully grasp the depth of Bonhoeffer's incarnational Christology and sociality requires a compressive understanding of many of Bonhoeffer's works and his transitions in thought over time, as well as knowledge about how he embodied his own theological ethics.

As already mentioned, Daly cites only from *Letters and Papers from Prison*, a tendency that is common among later twentieth-century and contextual theological thinkers. A fuller understanding of Bonhoeffer's Christology requires in depth engagement with his earlier writings as well. Overall, Bonhoeffer's emphasis is not on the male form of Christ, but on a close personal relationship with Christ, the worldly immanence of God that was

brought about through the incarnation, and a conformation to Christ's will through careful discernment and engagement with the world.[50]

In general, when Bonhoeffer is mentioned by liberation, feminist, and contextual theologians, the reference is typically to either Bonhoeffer's concept of a suffering God or his emphasis on Jesus being a man for others. However, in his book *Church: Charism and Power*, liberation theologian Leonardo Boff characterizes Bonhoeffer (along with Barth) as a typical dualistic Bible-centered Protestant who understands "religion as a human effort aimed at guaranteeing salvation, and faith as a free gift from God."[51] Boff then contrasts how Catholic theology understands religion and faith specifically as distinct but inextricably interrelated:

> Catholic understanding of religion as a mediation distinguishes faith and religion but also understands that, on the level of praxis, both form an indissoluble and unmistakable unity. The justifiable desire to distinguish them does not legitimate that which, in concrete life, is always one.[52]

This description of what Boff contrasts with Bonhoeffer's belief about faith and religion exposes the superficiality of his reference to Bonhoeffer here as Boff offers no nuance in the statements he makes about Bonhoeffer. He also misses the opportunity for fruitful dialogue with a theologian whose praxis culminated in martyrdom. What Boff presents is

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50. It is also worth noting that many other Christians and traditions share this emphasis, including notably the Jesuits.

51. Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 95. Here Boff also states that Bonhoeffer particularly favors discussions about the relationship between faith and religion, that Bonhoeffer has "an excessive passion" for "gospel purity," and therefore that Bonhoeffer "counterposes faith and religion."

52. "Catholic understanding of religion as a mediation distinguishes faith and religion but also understands that, on the level of praxis, both form an indissoluble and unmistakable unity. The justifiable desire to distinguish them does not legitimate that which, in concrete life, is always one" (Boff, *Church*, 95).

a polemical statement about a supposedly static and systemic ideology, which is hardly the case with Bonhoeffer. Furthermore, it is ironic for Boff to use a Protestant theologian such as Bonhoeffer in a publication explicitly dedicated to discussions about liberation theology and the institutional Roman Catholic Church.

Boff makes similarly superficial and passing references to Bonhoeffer in other publications as well. For example, in *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World* Boff twice uses the phrase "as Bonhoeffer says/said" followed by a brief quote without providing even a citation to Bonhoeffer's works.[53] Likewise in *Jesus Christ Liberator*, Boff quotes Kierkegaard, noting that Bonhoeffer also quoted the same idea from Kierkegaard. However, Boff does not elaborate on why it is relevant that Bonhoeffer quoted from Kierkegaard. Boff has two longer quotes from Bonhoeffer in *Ecclesiogenesis.*[54] *The first, indeed, is a lengthy block quote:*

> It is not for us to prophesy the day (though the day will come) when men will once more be called so to utter the word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it. It will be a new language, perhaps quite nonreligious, but liberating and redeeming—as was Jesus' language; it will shock people and yet overcome them by its power; it will be the language of a new righteousness and truth, proclaiming God's peace with men and the coming of his kingdom. "They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it" (Jer. 33:9).[55]

Yet Boff is uninterested in critically engaging Bonhoeffer; he cites him merely to make the claim that "these words seem fulfilled to the letter in the Christianity being lived

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53. Leonardo Boff, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987): "Socrates, as Bonhoeffer said, deliver us from ding, by his serenity and sovereignty" (65) and "As Bonhoeffer says, a God who does not suffer cannot free us" (111). Boff provides no citations to Bonhoeffer's works or further reference to him in this book.

54. Leonard Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986).

55. Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis, 34, citing Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. R. H. Fuller, enl. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 300.*

in thousands of basic church communities across all the working-class neighborhoods of the land."[56] Later Boff cites the same passage again before calling Bonhoeffer "the prophetic theologian."[57] But prophetic how? Again, apparently in the sense that Bonhoeffer's words conveniently serve Boff's own purposes. It is difficult to read these passing references to Bonhoeffer as anything other than Boff appealing to a popular theologian in support of his own arguments.

Later in *Jesus Christ Liberator* Boff quotes from *Letters and Papers from Prison* in a way that seems like a more substantial engagement with Bonhoeffer's ideas about the weakness of God and the world's fundamentally incarnational orientation:

> The universal meaning of the life and death of Christ, therefore, is that he sustained the fundamental conflict of human existence to the end: He wanted to realize the absolute meaning of this world before God, in spite of hate, incomprehension, betrayal, and condemnation to death. For Jesus, evil does not exist in order to be comprehended, but to be taken over and conquered by love. This comportment of Jesus opened up a new possibility for human existence, i.e. an existence of faith with absolute meaning, even when confronted with the absurd, as was his own death—caused by hate for one who only loved and only sought to of good among people. Hence, Bonhoeffer can say that a Christian today is called to live this weakness of God in the world. "Jesus does not call us to a new religion. Jesus calls us to life. What sort of life? To participate in the weakness of God in the world." This kind of life is a new life and triumphs where all ideologies and human speculations fail, i.e., in despair, in unmerited suffering, in injustice, in violent death.[58]

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56. Boff, *34*.

57. Boff, *44*.

58. Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*, trans. Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), 119; the Bonhoeffer quote is from the 1953 printing of *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan), p. 347–348. Boff continues his engagement with Bonhoeffer, writing, "Is there meaning in all this? Yes. But only when taken on before God, in love and hope that goes beyond death. To believe in this manner is to believe with Jesus who believed. To follow him is to realize the same comportment within our own conditions of life that are no longer his. The resurrection reveals in all its profundity that to believe and persevere in the absurd and meaningless is not without meaning. In a celebrated poem Bonhoeffer expressed well the profound meaning of the passion for the life of a Christian: Men go to God when they are sore bestead /

Although this seems like a serious engagement with Bonhoeffer's thoughts, and even has potential to dialogue with what Bonhoeffer meant by religionless Christianity and *etsi Deus non daretur*, it is nevertheless not any more substantive or genuinely engaging than Boff's other superficial references to Bonhoeffer.

**Bonhoeffer in Fragments: Bonhoeffer as a Historical and Theological Marker**

Considering Bonhoeffer's full corpus of works is especially important because of the transitions in Bonhoeffer's thinking that took place over time and in relationship to political, social, and historical circumstances. Despite this fact, Catholic theologians rarely mention Bonhoeffer's transitions in thought when quoting or citing him. Whether they cite solely from a single publication/time period in Bonhoeffer's life, or from many different publications throughout his life, Catholic scholars often make no mention of these transitions. This contributes to their failure to represent the full picture of Bonhoeffer's ideas.

In his historical tome *Catholicism*, Richard McBrien does set forth three periods of Bonhoeffer's theological development that are similar to stages which leading Protestant Bonhoeffer scholars have also identified.[59] These phases are (1) the liberal phase, which was shattered by World War I; (2) the confessional (Barthian) phase (undermined by Nazism); and (3) the Abwehr or fragmentation phase. The third phase developments were prompted by

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Pray to him for succor, for his peace, for bread, / For mercy for them sick, sinning, or dead; / All men do so, Christian and unbelieving. / Men go to God when he is sore bestead, / Find him poor and scorned, without shelter or bread. / Whelmed under weight of the wicked, the weak, the dead; / Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving. / God goes to everyman when sore bestead, / Feeds body and spirit with his bread; / For Christians, pagans alike he hangs dead, / And both alike forgiving" (119–120).

59. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 497–499.

the devastating experiences of World War II.[60] McBrien calls this third phase the ecumenical phase, which in itself is a naïve representation of Bonhoeffer's theological development in his later life. For although Bonhoeffer did value ecumenism and it was a centerpiece of his public theological persona, Bonhoeffer's deeper desire throughout his life, but especially after the fall of Paris in 1940, was to deliver Germany, the Jews, and the world from the evil clutches of Hitler and his Nazi Party. Chapter 4 will discuss this in more detail in dialogue with Protestant Bonhoeffer scholars.

Aside from McBrien, whose references to Bonhoeffer will be discussed in more detail later in this section, Catholic theologians who engage more fully with Bonhoeffer's ideas tend to select only fragments of Bonhoeffer's ideas to engage seriously, ignoring a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and nuances in Bonhoeffer's thought. These theologians often focus on a specific publication, theme, or an oft-repeated phrase.[61]

In some cases, proof texting Bonhoeffer's works can lead to an incomplete understanding of Bonhoeffer's theology, as was the case with the examples discussed above. However, in many cases, fragments or "catchphrases" from Bonhoeffer's thought have become so well-known that they appear very often in Catholic theological writing as a representation of the whole of Bonhoeffer's thinking on certain topics. Using these catchphrases as representative of Bonhoeffer overall often diminishes his thinking and leads to incomplete analysis. Some of the most popular of these fragments are:

- "religionless Christianity" (from *Letters and Papers from Prison*)

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60. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 497–499.

61. This critique is made most particularly considering the ongoing dialogue in Bonhoeffer scholarship about the question of continuity in Bonhoeffer's works, especially among certain themes that he returns to throughout his career. This is an issue that will be discussed in chapter 2.

- "*etsi Deus non daretur*" ("as if God did not exist," from *Letters and Papers from Prison*)
- "world come of age" (from *Letters and Papers from Prison*)
- "cheap" or "costly grace" or "discipleship" (from *Discipleship*)
- "suffering God" from (from *Letters and Papers from Prison*)
- referring to Jesus as "man for others" (from *Ethics*)

The common usage of these catchphrases coupled with a lack of engagement with the full scope of Bonhoeffer's life and work has led to the development of mere caricatures of Bonhoeffer's theology and ethics. It is most often these caricatures to which Catholic theologians are referring. The most common way that Bonhoeffer has been caricaturized is as a historical marker for modernity through reference to a phrase he coined in *Letters and Papers from Prison*: "a world come of age."

Bonhoeffer scholar and editor of *Letters and Papers from Prison* (DBWE 8), John de Gruchy points out that "Bonhoeffer introduced the term 'world come age' (*Mündigkeit*) in a letter to Eberhardt Bethge on June 8, 1944."[62] De Gruchy further explains that Bonhoeffer borrowed this term from late nineteenth century German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey.[63] However, in theological communities, it is Bonhoeffer who has become most closely associated with the term.

Catholic theologians often cite this phrase as a synonym for the modern era, especially in writings that offer an overview of the "church in the modern world." Among other Catholic thinkers, fellow German theologians and contemporaries of Bonhoeffer, Hans

62. De Gruchy, "Listening to the Word of God," DBWE 3:23.

63. De Gruchy, 3:23. In the notes, Dilthey is described as having "helped form the modern study of hermeneutics and the philosophy of history."

Küng, and Joseph Ratzinger pick up this phrase and use it to frame their own discussions about the turn to the modern era.[64] However, it is Richard McBrien who offers the most comprehensive engagement of Bonhoeffer's world come of age discussion.

McBrien, who refers to a "church come of age" in *Catholicism*, explains that when Bonhoeffer used the phrase "world come of age," he meant a world that "no longer takes the religious premise for granted."[65] A world come of age is a world that no longer *assumes* the existence of the Christian God. Here, McBrien specifically means the pre-modern theistic understanding of the Christian God as the benevolent and all-powerful grandfather observing the world from above it, diligently attentive to our needs and "ready to intervene against evil."[66]

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64. For Ratzinger, see Joseph Ratzinger [Benedict XVI], *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Beliefs and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 54. Here, as in other publications, Ratzinger connects this with another theme from *Letters and Papers from Prison* that he takes issue with—religionless Christianity, "That is why anyone who sees in the religions of the world only reprehensible superstition is wrong; but also why anyone who wants only to give a positive evaluation of all religions, and who has suddenly forgotten the criticism of religions that has been burned into our souls not only by Feuerbach and Marx but also by such great theologians as Karl Barth and Bonhoeffer, is equally wrong" (*Truth and Tolerance*, 65–66) Ratzinger also understands Bonhoeffer's "world come of age" as synonymous with another phrase from *Letters and Papers from Prison*, where Bonhoeffer talks about having to live in the world "*etsi Deus non daretur*" (as if God did not exist). See also by Ratzinger the following: *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Dogma to Daily Life*, unabridged ed., ed. Michael J. Miller, trans. Michael J. Miller and Matthew J. O'Connell (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), 390; *Credo for Today: What Christians Believe*, ed. Holger Zaborowski and Alwin Letzkus, trans. Michael J. Miller et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006); *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster, with a new preface trans. Michael J. Miller, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), chap. 2; and *Co-Workers of the Truth: Meditations for Every Day of the Year*, ed. Irene Grassl, trans. Mary Francis McCarthy and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992). See also by Hans Küng *Truthfulness: The Future of the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 43–44, and *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology*, trans. J. R. Stephenson (New York: Crossroad, 1987). In this second work, Küng offers a more insightful interpretation of Bonhoeffer's world come of age, putting an incarnational spin on it (552).

65. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 92.

66. McBrien, 92.

McBrien explains that in his discussion of a world come of age, Bonhoeffer identified a challenge to the church in the twentieth century: the challenge of finding "a way to preach the Lordship of Jesus Christ to a world without religion."[67] This connects with McBrien's understanding of another famous and oft-repeated phrase of Bonhoeffer's: "religionless Christianity," which is a concept Bonhoeffer also discussed in letters to Bethge.

Like McBrien, Walter Kasper situates a discussion of some of Bonhoeffer's key concepts within a historical overview of theological developments in the modern era. In this historical narrative, Kasper primarily identifies Bonhoeffer, and his heralding of modernity as "a world come of age" within discussions about the secularization of Western culture and emergence of modern atheism that took place in the early twentieth century.[68]

Also like McBrien, Kasper is a Catholic theologian who frequently references Bonhoeffer in various publications. In *The God of Jesus Christ*, Kasper briefly identifies what he considers to be the most popular of Bonhoeffer's ideas based on which ideas have most often been repeated by Catholic theologians. Kasper's selections of Bonhoeffer's most popular ideas represent well the tendencies in especially early twentieth-century theologians to superficially engage the ambiguous concept of religionless Christianity, the influence of Barth on Bonhoeffer, as well as their points of divergence, and Bonhoeffer's fruitful analysis of costly versus cheap grace from *Discipleship*.

In addition to relating Bonhoeffer's historical relevance to secularization in the modern world, Kasper also situates Bonhoeffer's theological contributions within discussions about precursors to secular religion, death of God theories, and modern atheism.Bernard

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67. McBrien, 92.

68. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 60.

Lonergan also locates Bonhoeffer in interdisciplinary discussions about sacralization and secularization among others such as Karl Barth, Friedrich Gogarten, Paul Ricoeur, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and Peter Berger.[69] Extending beyond the strictly theological community, Catholic Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo compares Bonhoeffer to "other" death of God theologians (such as Cox, Altizer, Hamilton, and van Buren) in *After Christianity* while also superficially mentioning religionless Christianity.[70]

These examples highlight another way that Bonhoeffer is used as a historical marker in theological discussions: as a forefather to death of God and post-Christian theologies. However, representing Bonhoeffer's concepts of religionless Christianity and a world come of age as *only* relevant to the development of secular and radical theologies diminishes the full and complex meaning of these concepts. Bonhoeffer's deep theological insights contributed to the development of many theologies (Protestant and Catholic) of the twentieth century, including political, feminist, liberation, and contextual theologies that are popular today.[71]

Catholic historian James Livingston comments on the contemporary trend of secular theologians to draw heavily on the work of Bonhoeffer, especially Bonhoeffer's statements

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69. Bernard Lonergan, "Sacralization and Secularization," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965–1980*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 17 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). Lonergan identifies Bonhoeffer as a "particularly renowned" name on the subject (259). The discussion, as expected, leads to death of God theories and modern atheism.

70. Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 36–38.

71. Examples of these include the theologies of Jon Sobrino, Johann Baptist Metz, Sallie McFague, John Caputo, and Tomáš Halík. These authors represent 'liberal' counterparts to the orthodox conservatives who read Bonhoeffer's work only to bolster their own theological agenda. In contrast to those who breeze over Bonhoeffer's complexity for political-ideological reasons, these Catholic authors offer a more nuanced reading and tend to be more 'liberal' in their theological orientation. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this project to get into any of these authors in detail.

about a world come of age and religionless Christianity from *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Livingston claims that "more than any other single factor" Bonhoeffer's ideas in *Letters and Papers from Prison* provided "the spark that ignited the radical secular movement of the early 1960s."[72]

Livingston names Hume as a good example of a man "come of age": "[Hume's] indifference to the 'religious hypothesis' is more typical of the healthy agnosticism of the modern secular person 'come of age' described by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Hume is the modern secularist par excellence."[73] This quote displays Livingston's interpretation of what Bonhoeffer meant by a world come of age: a world that is indifferent to the "religious hypothesis." However, to interpret Bonhoeffer's writings as indifferent to religion or the Christian premise of reality is to misinterpret Bonhoeffer significantly.

This is a good example of how Bonhoeffer's "world come of age" is often identified with decidedly negative connotations and language about the secularization of the Western world and that which is "secular." This idea is also often paraphrased as a characterization of the world as "adult." As such, Bonhoeffer's concept of a world come of age has come to indicate little more than an alternative way of referring to modernity or secularization.

Catholic Theologians who use Bonhoeffer to situate an overview of modern theological developments also tend to interpret Bonhoeffer's concept of religionless Christianity in one of two ways; either as an expression of the Protestant (and especially

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72. James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Vatican II* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1971), 480.

73. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 63.

Barthian) distinction between faith and religion, or as a critique of the imperfect nature of human religious institutions.[74] For example, de LuBac warns against using Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity to argue that Bonhoeffer understood religion as the antithesis of faith and he affirms that Bonhoeffer did not want faith without religion.[75]

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger explains this concept further, pointing to the clear distinction Karl Barth made between faith and religion. Ratzinger locates this distinction, and Barth's rejection of all religion in favor of faith, as the foundation upon which Bonhoeffer "sketched out a program for religionless Christianity."[76]

Lonergan groups the "religionless Christianity" of Bonhoeffer and Barth together and presents it as the ever-present and complex tension between the worldly "organization" aspect of religion and the distinct, yet always connected, mystical aspect.[77]

McBrien's interpretation of religionless Christianity is like Lonergan's. However, McBrien describes this concept more fully, explaining that Bonhoeffer did not mean religion without prayer, worship, doctrine, or formal institutional structures when he wrote about a religionless Christianity. Rather, according to McBrien, Bonhoeffer was writing about Christianity that does not confuse faith with Church institutions and structures (i.e. with religion). McBrien explains that Church structures are rightly understood as embodiments,

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74. Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 49–50. See also 54, 65–66.

75. Henri de Lubac, *The Christian Faith: An Essay on the Structure of the Apostle's Creed*, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 157, 159.

76. Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 50.

77. Bernard Lonergan, "The Future of Christianity," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 157.

expressions, and carriers of faith, but are not identical to faith (nor are they identical to God).[78]

McBrien further explains that from this perspective, to be a Christian would not be primarily identified with certain devotional and aesthetical practices, but rather being Christian means "to live in a fully human way, in the service of others, as Jesus lived and served."[79] Therefore, McBrien explains that Bonhoeffer's discussion of religionless Christianity is in effect an identification of the challenge facing the Christian church in the modern era to find "a way to preach the Lordship of Jesus Christ to a world without religion."[80]

Assimilating Bonhoeffer's idea of religionless Christianity to a critique of the ever-present tensions between divine embodiment and human faults of the institutional church obscures what is really at stake in Bonhoeffer's writing. Bonhoeffer's concept of religionless Christianity does presume critiques of the god of the gaps, imperfections of human church leaders, and individualized religion or privatized piety in the secular world. However, it contains much more than these critiques, which are hardly unique to Bonhoeffer. Embedded within Bonhoeffer's concept of religionless Christianity is not only a serious challenge to the religious, political, social, and theological status quos, but also key aspects of an ethics of resistance to totalitarian powers that capitalize on religious sentiment in order to amass power and loyalty among Christian citizens. Kasper seemed to grasp this more fully than his contemporaries.

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78. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 92.

79. McBrien, 92.

80. McBrien, 92.

In his interpretation of religionless Christianity in *The God of Jesus Christ*, Kasper mentions Bonhoeffer's connection to the Barthian tradition and death of God theories, but he emphasizes a different perspective. Kasper describes Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity as "a renewed theology of the cross," and uses it to foster dialogue with modernity, secularization, and atheism without rejecting them.[81] Kasper explains: "The God of Jesus Christ allows himself to be expelled from the world through the cross; he is helpless and weak in the world, and only under these conditions does he abide with us and help us."[82]

Kasper is not the only Catholic theologian to employ similar language about God being pushed out of the world, which is itself a reference to another phrase of Bonhoeffer's that Catholic theologians often cite: "*etsi Deus non daretur*" ("as if God did not exist"). This is a phrase Bonhoeffer used in *Letters and Papers from Prison* to describe how Christians must live in the modern world. McBrien dialogues with this catchphrase when he explores the nature of God and God's relationship to the world in *Catholicism*.[83] However, one of the most in-depth engagements of Bonhoeffer's concept of *etsi Deus non daretur* comes from Ratzinger.

Ratzinger made references to Bonhoeffer in several publications throughout his career as theologian and pontiff. Typically, these references condemn what Ratzinger interprets as Bonhoeffer's endorsement of the "secular world," including Bonhoeffer's discussions of religionless Christianity and *etsi Deus non daretur*.[84] Reading Bonhoeffer's reference to a

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81. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 59–60.

82. Kasper, 59.

83. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 499.

84. Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 50, 65–66. Ratzinger elsewhere makes a cursory reference to Bonhoeffer's assertation that the believer today must live as if God did not exist (*quasi Deus non daretur*) and then states, "I fully agree with what this saying is intended to express, namely, that we

world without God through the lens of the Protestant dualism evident in Bonhoeffer's earlier works, Ratzinger criticizes the distinction Bonhoeffer puts between faith and religion.[85] In his conclusion to *Dogma and Preaching*, Ratzinger interprets Bonhoeffer's comments about *etsi dues non daretur* as an appeal for Christians to keep God out of everyday entanglements. Ratzinger then counsels Christians to do the opposite.[86]

In *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger reveals that he understands Bonhoeffer's phrase as a critique of the god of the gaps:

> Bonhoeffer thought, as is well known, that it was time to finish with a God whom we insert to fill the gap at the limit of our own powers, whom we call up when we ourselves are at the end of our tether. We ought to find God, he thought, not, so to speak, in our moments of need and failure, but amid the fullness of earthly life.[87]

In *Anthropology & Culture*[88] Ratzinger clarifies further how he understands Bonhoeffer's statement *etsi Deus non daretur*, again interpreting the phrase as a reference to a god of the gaps:

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must avoid an egotistical and primitive notion of God that misuses him as a stopgap in our earthly failure. Nevertheless, I think that for the conduct of life it would be more appropriate to suggest the opposite. Even the skeptic and the atheist should live *quasi Deus daretur*—as though God really exists" ("Beyond Death," trans. W. J. O'Hara, in *Anthropology and Culture*, edited by David L. Schindler and Nicholas J. Healy, vol. 2 of *Joseph Ratzinger in* Communio (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 14). Ratzinger also names Bonhoeffer in passing, alongside Soelle and Bultmann, as providing a foundation to modern secular and death-of-God theories (*Faith and the Future*, 71–72). See also Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986; repr. 2006), 23.

85. In addition to citations in note 64 in this chapter, see also by Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 49, 54.

86. Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 390. See also Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth*, where Ratzinger summarizes (and then criticizes) Bonhoeffer's use of "*quasi Dues non daretur*" as meaning that a man "must not involve God in the perplexities of his everyday life, but must assume responsibility for himself for the course of that life" (106).

87. Ratzinger *Introduction to Christianity*, 105.

88. Ratzinger, "Beyond Death," 14.

> As is well known, Dietrich Bonhoeffer once formulated the thought that the believer today must live *quasi Deus non daretur*—as though God did not exist. I fully agree with what this saying is intended to express, namely, that we must avoid an egotistical and primitive notion of God that misuses him as a stopgap in our earthly failure. Nevertheless, I think that for the conduct of life it would be more appropriate to suggest the opposite. Even the skeptic and the atheist should live *quasi Deus daretur*—as though God really exists.[89]

Ratzinger goes on to explain what he understands as the way of Christian living that is opposite to Bonhoeffer's *etsi Deus non daretur*:

> What does this mean? To live as though God exists means to live as though one had an unlimited responsibility; as though justice and truth were not only programs, but a living existent power to which one has to render an account; as though what one does now would not disappear like a drop in the ocean, but was of lasting, even permanent consequence. To act as though God exists would also mean to act as though the human being next to me were not just some chance product of Nature, of no great ultimate importance, but an embodied thought of God, an image of the Creator whom he knows and loves. That would mean acting as though each human being were destined for eternity and as though each were my brother because created by the same God.[90]

It is in this description of living as if God did exist that Ratzinger's misinterpretation of Bonhoeffer's thinking is most obvious. Ratzinger's understanding of living as if God *did* exist, as described in the quote above, resonates deeply with Bonhoeffer's understanding of living as if God *did not* exist. Ratzinger's error is in setting up his way of life as a contrast to the way of life Bonhoeffer recommended.

In Bonhoeffer's understanding, Christians must act as if God did not exist because *if God did not exist* then the responsibility to love and save the world falls entirely to humans. In this sense, to live as if God did not exist means to *become God* to others, "God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross; God is weak and powerless in this world and

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89. Ratzinger, 14.

90. Ratzinger, 14.

in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us. Matt. 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us not by virtue of his omnipotence but rather by virtue of his weakness and suffering!"[91]

Bonhoeffer's concept of sacred communities, his incarnational Christology, his servant ecclesiology, his understanding of discipleship as conformation to Christ, his costly grace all point to this truth. Unfortunately, failing to engage in the full scope of Bonhoeffer's work makes misinterpreting his ideas more likely, as is the case with Ratzinger's use of Bonhoeffer's *etsi Deus non daretur*. Additionally, Ratzinger failed to grasp the contextual nature of Bonhoeffer's theology and instead interpreted his ideas based on an eschatology that favors the "not yet" rather than the "here and now" of the kingdom of God.

Catholic theologians who focus only superficially on Bonhoeffer's idea of living in the world as if God did not exist often also miss how this phrase is connected to Bonhoeffer's incarnational Christology.[92] Many of Bonhoeffer's Catholic contemporaries thus fail to engage with Bonhoeffer's thoughts about God's worldly immanence, as well as Bonhoeffer's

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91. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, German edition ed. Christian Gremmels et al., English edition ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Isabel Best et al., DBWE 8 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 479. This is the basis of much of my constructive theology in the final chapter where I argue that God's is a love that says "I free you." I also think a good translation of the true meaning of Bonhoeffer's concept of *etsi Deus non daretur* can be found in the concept of "extravagant tenderness," as explained by Gregory Boyle in his book The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness (New York: Avid Reader, 2021). Boyle is also a good example of an informal theology of fragmentation (although he may not claim to be). Boyle's unconventional narrative and dialectical approach weaves together many voices—autobiographical, biblical, homie, and theological to make more meaning out of a million moments of tenderness—thus presenting a theology of tenderness albeit in and from fragments.

92. As already noted, Kasper is an exception to this.

concepts about a suffering God and Jesus as a man for others, which are topics that liberation and contextual theologians often favor.[93]

## No Ground Under Our Feet: Bonhoeffer Without Context

The tendency to misinterpret Bonhoeffer and to use him as a theological prop is common among Catholic theological thinkers because very often they fail to engage in dialogue with leading and contemporary Bonhoeffer scholars and instead rely almost entirely on fragmentary and incomplete primary sources.[94]

One of the most important secondary resources for understanding Bonhoeffer's theology and ethics is his biography. This is true for several reasons. Firstly, as already explained in the Introduction, some of Bonhoeffer's most popular works are personal, fragmented, informal, and unfinished. In addition to this, at the time that Bonhoeffer was writing, German theologians who openly opposed National Socialism where persecuted by Nazis. Therefore, Bonhoeffer (and other German theologians who opposed Nazism) wrote about general and universal Christian ideas, rather than addressing the specific social political situation.

However, it would be erroneous to think that Bonhoeffer's writings were not directly related to the experience of Germany in the early twentieth century. His publications cannot be considered outside the context of how he experienced the historical events taking place at the time. Green and Carter explain:

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93. Only one example of reference to these ideas is discussed in this chapter since, similar to Bonhoeffer's other catchphrases, most references to these ideas are too cursory to reflect in discussion.

94. For more information about how Bonhoeffer's publications are fragmentary or incomplete, see the Introduction, where this is addressed more in depth.

> It is probably possible to understand, appreciate, and interpret the systems of some theologians relatively independently of their historical circumstances…. Not so with Bonhoeffer, for much of his theology and ethics was forged in engagement with theological antagonists in the church as well as with the doctrines and policies of Nazi politics. Yet Bonhoeffer's theology is not an epiphenomenon of the church struggle and resistance to Nazism. A thinker of the first order, whose often subtle intellectual decisions and distinctions are overlooked by fascination with the drama of his life, his theological and ethical thinking must be examined in its own integrity.[95]

This insight into Bonhoeffer's theological ethics is particularly important because Green and Carter identify two crucial tasks for those who seek to fully understand Bonhoeffer. Green and Carter firstly emphasize how Bonhoeffer's thinking is intimately related to his life experiences. They also highlight the validity of context as a theological source for Bonhoeffer.

Universal Christian truths can be glimpsed through specific contexts. This insight is an essential premise of feminist, liberation, and contextual theologians since the mid-twentieth century. Green and Carter point out that such universal truth can be found in Bonhoeffer's writings when they are understood in proper relationship to their context.

Knowledge of Bonhoeffer's life and experience provides a clearer and wider lens through which to view and understand his published writings. Unfortunately, where Bonhoeffer's biography is mentioned by Catholic theologians, it is usually a brief reference to the fact that Bonhoeffer was a Nazi resistor or that he was executed by the Nazis. Bonhoeffer's biography is also more commonly mentioned in works about spirituality and spiritual development, and often in combination with his own concepts of discipleship and costly grace.[96]

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95. Green and Carter, *Interpreting Bonhoeffer*, xii.

96. A few examples of authors who have used Bonhoeffer's biography in spiritual texts, as opposed to works on doctrine or systematic theology, are Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and

Such cursory engagements of Bonhoeffer's life further the simplistic caricatures of a complex figure whose interactions with the world and personal spiritual development led him to great growth, changes in thought, and actions that would eventually cost him his life. Bonhoeffer's execution itself is often the source of one of his typical caricatures: Bonhoeffer the martyr.

Furthermore, Bonhoeffer's engagement with the resistance movement itself was varied and complex and cannot be considered monolithically. Beginning with joining the Confessional Church, Bonhoeffer dedicated much time to forming young pastors. Bonhoeffer kept in touch with many of these men, some of whom became German soldiers, and continued to offer theological and pastoral advice through letters. Bonhoeffer also travelled outside of Germany, exposing himself to wider experiences, becoming engaged with the ecumenical movement. He used the contacts he made internationally to build opposition to Hitler. Bonhoeffer wrestled with decisions about how best to oppose Nazism, whether to flee his country for his own safety, and finally whether to participate in a deceptive underground movement to displace Hitler and end Nazi control in Germany.

As is the case with other critiques already made in this chapter, failing to integrate Bonhoeffer's historical context results in a misleading compartmentalization of Bonhoeffer's theology, his spirituality, and his life. Is not the way in which Bonhoeffer developed his thought and the motivation for his actions as important as the thoughts and the actions themselves? This question is particularly relevant to the later chapters of this dissertation, where the relevance of Bonhoeffer's work and his life to the current political and religious context in the U.S. are discussed. These points are especially important to consider when

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Thomas Rausch.

Bonhoeffer's work is utilized ideologically in order to legitimate a particular theological point of view, such as one aligned with a Barthian neo-orthodox position.

## More Meaning of Our Life's Broken Fragments: What Catholic Theologians are Missing About Bonhoeffer

> We cannot hate [death] as we used to…. Fundamentally we feel that we really belong to death already, and that every new day is a miracle. It would probably not be true to say that we welcome death … we are too inquisitive for that—or, to put it more seriously, we should like to see something more of the meaning of our life's broken fragments.[97]

As explained in the introduction, leading Protestant Bonhoeffer scholars have identified important aspects of overall cohesion and consistency in Bonhoeffer's works that is referred to within contemporary secondary sources on Bonhoeffer as "Bonhoeffer's legacy."

Considering Bonhoeffer's legacy a "work-in-progress," Protestant theologian and prominent Bonhoeffer scholar Victoria Barnett points out that "despite the vast documentation" we have of Bonhoeffer's works "and the countless books that have been written about Bonhoeffer, his life and work remain fragmentary in many ways."[98] Barnett explains that neither the grand narrative of Bonhoeffer's legacy nor any one fragment of this narrative can fill in all the gaps. Therefore, in many ways, ambiguity will always characterize Bonhoeffer's works.[99]

This is true not only because the grand narrative that is the foundation of Bonhoeffer's legacy is constructed out of fragments of his academic, pastoral, and personal writings,

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97. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. R. H. Fuller, Frank Clark, and John Bowden, enl. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 16.

98. Barnett, "Bonhoeffer Legacy as Work-in-Progress," 93.

99. Barnett.

supplemented by the many biographies, historical records, and commentaries about Bonhoeffer, but also because ambiguity characterizes Bonhoeffer's own theology in many ways. This is especially clear when examining Bonhoeffer's ethics, and is something that Catholic theologians miss when they fail to engage Bonhoeffer comprehensively.

Bonhoeffer's theological ethics, especially his later thinking, reflect an embrace not only of contextual ambiguity, but of the reality of a life and a world defined by fragmentation. He explains in Eberhard Bethge that

> the important thing today is that we should be able to discern from the fragment of our life how the whole was arranged and planned, and what material it consists of. For really, there are some fragments that are only worth throwing into the dustbin … and others whose importance lasts for centuries, because their completion can only be a matter for God, and so they are fragments that must be fragments…. If our life is but the remotest reflection of such a fragment, if we accumulate, at least for a short time, a wealth of themes and weld them into a harmony in which the great counterpoint is maintained from start to finish, so that at last, when it breaks off abruptly, we can sing no more than the chorale, "I come before thy throne," we will not bemoan the fragmentariness of our life, but rather rejoice in it. … Here, too, is a necessary fragment of life—"but I will give you your life as a prize of war."[100]

It is not only Bonhoeffer's works that are fragmented, but also his country, his religion, his life. Bonhoeffer's reflections on his experiences offer an insight into a new way of doing theology—through fragmentation.

Bonhoeffer witnessed the beginning of the fragmentation of modern Western civilization and traditional systematic theology. Now in steep decline, fragments of these systems continue to crumble around the world, spreading today even to creation itself as the world faces the overwhelming ramifications of global climate change. The idea of doing theology as a monograph study is nearing its completion and is being replaced with a new

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100. Bonhoeffer to Bethge, Tegel, February 23, 1944, in *Letters and Papers from Prison* [1972], 219.

era of a theology of fragments. Bonhoeffer's writings that wrestle directly with contextual ambiguity and fragmentation while also being grounded in an incarnational Christocentrism offer important insights for Christian theology to grow through these transitions.

By embracing ambiguity as foundational to his theological ethics, Bonhoeffer challenges us to move beyond an understanding of ethics as a continuous linear progression toward the identification of actions, thoughts, and attitudes that can be categorized as "right" and "wrong." Bonhoeffer's ethics teaches us that in the modern era faith in Jesus Christ as a continuous compass of action must replace certainty in codes of behavior, even codes of behavior that have been long-standing establishments of Christian institutions.

Misusing the intended ambiguity in Bonhoeffer's theology to create caricatures of Bonhoeffer or appropriating fragments of his work without considering their full contexts, such as those offered by the Catholic theologians discussed in this chapter, diminishes their meaning and potential for constructive engagement.

Bonhoeffer's theology evolved overtime in dialogue with the world, his life, and his socio-political context. Catholic theologian Gerald O'Collins points to Bonhoeffer's process of development as an example of a personal experience with God's on-going self-revelation. Embracing the same contextual nature of theology as Bonhoeffer himself did, Protestant theologian Florian Schmitz identifies the approach that Bonhoeffer developed as an "incredible ability to update his theology." Schmitz suggests, therefore, that Bonhoeffer's relevance for ethics today is situated in a "way of thinking that leads Bonhoeffer to his answers," versus the actual answers themselves.[101] This is the second aspect of Bonhoeffer's theological ethics that Catholic theologians have largely missed. The relevance of

101. Schmitz, "Reading Discipleship and Ethics Together," 153.

Bonhoeffer's thought is not only situated in specific ethical and theological formulations, but also in his theological method.

Such an approach to theological ethics is especially necessary in the U.S. today due to the profound polarization that has emerged in the Catholic Church between so-called "conservative" and "progressive" or "liberal" Catholics. Much of this polarization reflects the tension between a legalistic commitment to rigid moral codes versus a contextual (or "relativistic") approach to ethics that has been central to the Church in the modern world. This tension, and the resulting polarization of American Catholics, has left Catholicism and Catholic believers vulnerable to political hijacking. Bringing Bonhoeffer's approach to ethics, which was significantly shaped by his life experiences in a similar political climate, into dialogue with this situation can shed light on how to diffuse the tension and resist the politicization of Catholicism by totalitarian forces.

A comprehensive interpretation of Bonhoeffer's legacy is also especially called for given the current anti-intellectual climate in the U.S., fueled by the emergence of what has been coined an "alternative-truth" political culture. Several scholars, including contemporary Bonhoeffer scholars, have already pointed out the parallels between National Socialism in Germany during Bonhoeffer's life and imperialist capitalism and neoliberalism in American society today.[102]

Especially important to Catholic theology within these parallel situations is the tendency of totalizing political forces to hijack religious sentiment and use it to perpetuate

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102. See Bloomquist, "Radicalizing Reformation"; Bloomquist, *Seeing-Remembering-Connecting*; Bedford-Strom, "Reformation"; Boesak, "Church, Racism and Resistance"; McBride, "Reformation through Repentance"; and McBride, *Radical Discipleship*; Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*.

unjust social and economic structures and to preserve oppression of certain groups.[103] The fact that Bonhoeffer offered the "earliest and most consistent critiques of [Nazi] politicization of" the Church[104] is itself reason enough to make his theology an important ally to developing modes of resisting these totalizing quasi-religious forces.

It is at this point that it becomes necessary to call attention to the fact that a good deal of cursory references within Catholic theologies to Bonhoeffer's work that lack an engagement with the complexity of his thought do so in order to legitimate their more or less neo-orthodox theological position, as this chapter has demonstrated. This "hijacking" of Bonhoeffer's work begs the question: to what end?

What the common use of Bonhoeffer among Catholic theologians shows for sure is that he has widespread theological credibility. This credibility is amplified by the fact that he was an early and unwavering voice in his resistance to Naziism—a political movement now, in retrospect, condemned by all Christian communities for its role is bringing about the *Shoah*, which leaves his work vulnerable to misappropriation. As I have explained in this chapter, some Catholic theologians have misappropriated fragments of Bonhoeffer's work to advance their own theological projects. I especially pointed out instances of this happening when the theological project being supported resonated with neoorthodoxy, which in turn has been used to support neoliberal agendas in today's pseudo-religious political rhetoric. To protect against these forms of misappropriation, which are intellectually misguided and politically dangerous, I argued that Bonhoeffer's theological fragments must be appreciated

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103. See Ericksen, "Bonhoeffer in History"; Boesak, "Church, Racism and Resistance"; and Bloomquist, "Radicalizing Reformation."

104. Barnett, "Looking for Luther."

in the full context of his work, a body of work which includes significant developments over time.

The most fundamental and crucial question for Catholic theology that is at stake in this issue is: what kind of Church does the Roman Catholic Church in America want to be today? The Catholic Church in the U.S. has, so far, largely failed to offer adequate theological resources to Catholics in America to effectively resist the hijacking of religious sentiment for neoliberal political domination from QAnon and other Alt-Right groups. Bonhoeffer's theology has valuable resources for constructing an ethics of resistance for American Catholics and a model for being church in an extreme political situation. The following chapters will explore these possibilities in depth.

# CHAPTER 2

# A THEOLOGIAN COME OF AGE WITH NO GROUND UNDERFOOT: MOMENTS IN THE LIFE OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Chapter 2 marks a significant transition in focus for this dissertation. Whereas chapter 1 looked at how Catholic authors have often not taken Bonhoeffer's context seriously, Chapters 2–4 engage deeply with the Bonhoeffer's works, his life and historical context, and (mostly Protestant) authoritative secondary literature on Bonhoeffer. The Catholic authors reviewed in chapter 1 were critiqued for using Bonhoeffer's works for their own ideological theological systems or contexts. However, Bonhoeffer developed his theology to resist exactly this type of theological "hijacking" in opposition to Nazism in Germany. The rise of the Third Reich precipitated the disintegration of German society (as will be discussed in the next two chapters), and Bonhoeffer embraced that fragmentation in his theology. Therefore, when looked at through the lens of fragmentation, rather than as a system (or as cogs in other systems), Bonhoeffer's theological works provide a place from which to resist theological and ethical hijacking. Such a theological ethics is crucial in the U.S. Catholic context today. Therefore chapter 2, and the following chapters, turn to not only Bonhoeffer's context, but also the contemporary Catholic U.S. context.

## Chapter Organization

Overall, this chapter describes how Bonhoeffer embodied his own ethical system and

explains how he applied these ethical and theological concepts in his lived experience. I will also explain how this can be meaningful to the contemporary U.S. Catholic situation.

The chapter proceeds in three sections. Section A, "Bonhoeffer and Fragmentation," explains the background and provides context for the content of the chapter, focused especially on Bonhoeffer's Legacy and addressing the issue of continuity versus discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's work.

The second section (section B) of this Chapter, titled "Fragments and Moments," traces the writings in *Ethics* in dialogue with historical and personal events in Bonhoeffer's life, paying close attention to match up the timeline of events with specific pieces of his writing.[1] The aim of section B is to demonstrate the lived expression of Bonhoeffer's theological ethics; how Bonhoeffer's ideas developed over time and in interaction with his context.

Relying on the biographical and interpretive work of Protestant theologians Eberhard Bethge and Samuel Wells to explain how Bonhoeffer developed a concept of ethics as formation, or *conformation*, to the will of Christ,[2] Section B traces the ways that Bonhoeffer's contextual approach interacts with his incarnational Christology and his overall Christocentric worldview.

Section C of this chapter is titled "Not Knowing" and it concludes the chapter with an explanation of the relevance of Bonhoeffer's theological ethics for today.

## Opening Observations

This chapter explains how it is Bonhoeffer's incarnational grounding that allows him to

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1. Most of these writings became parts of *Ethics*.

2. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography* and Samuel Wells, "Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Activist, Educator; Challenges for the Coming Generations," in *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, ed. Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

develop a contextual theological ethics that embraces the ambiguity of human existence and motivates his steadfast devotion to this ethics that enables him to make difficult and controversial decisions. To provide examples of Bonhoeffer's decision-making moments, this chapter builds on Lutheran theologian Florian Schmitz's work in "Reading Discipleship and Ethics Together: Implications for Ethics and Public Life." In this essay, Schmitz addresses the question of continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's writings, which has been a question of great interest to Bonhoeffer scholars. The debate about dis/continuity in Bonhoeffer's work is also something that Catholic theologians have referenced often, albeit superficially.

Most often, among both Catholic and Protestant theologians, the dis/continuity of Bonhoeffer's work is discussed directly in reference to Bonhoeffer's decision to take part in the underground resistance to National Socialism and a plot to assassinate Hitler. Some scholars have pointed out this decisions represents an abandonment of Bonhoeffer's early emphasis on pacifism. However, as this chapter will reveal, it is not a simple question of whether Bonhoeffer remained a pacifist or not.

This chapter will unfold specifically in reference to moments of crucial decision-making from Bonhoeffer's life that defy easy moral categorization in order to emphasize two points. Firstly, this chapter highlights Schmitz's assertion that "with his decision to participate in the German underground resistance and a conspiracy plot to assassinate Hitler, Bonhoeffer retreated from *essential* theological concepts" that were present in his early theology, especially *Discipleship*.[3] However, and secondly, these transitions in Bonhoeffer's thought are not proof of inconsistency in his fundamental theological and ethical convictions.

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3. Schmitz, "Reading Discipleship and Ethics Together," 147. The essential theological concepts to which Schmitz refers, and which will be the focus of the discussion in this chapter, are Bonhoeffer's embrace of strict pacifism in the face of evil and violence, and Bonhoeffer's early

Rather than being evidence of inconsistencies in his work, the observable shifts in Bonhoeffer's thinking actually reflect a contextual approach to theology which is useful to contemporary ethics. I will explain in this chapter how Bonhoeffer possessed a "tremendous ability to update his theology," as prompted by specific and unrepeatable historical situations.[4] Understanding the shifts of Bonhoeffer's thinking, therefore, must be understood through his ability to develop and change the specific ways in which he expressed the consistent convictions that grounded his theological ethics.

Doing this necessitates an understanding of Bonhoeffer's overall theological framework and a method of investigation that uncovers the underlying continuity of Bonhoeffer's ethic and the process by which Bonhoeffer changed his thinking about this consistent ethic over time. It is for this reason also that the analysis of Bonhoeffer's writings in this chapter is paired closely with an evaluation of specific moments in Bonhoeffer's life where he makes crucial decisions and actions that impact his ethical development.[5]

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emphasis on a two-realm reality. Bethge, among other Bonhoeffer scholars, argues that these are two points at which Bonhoeffer changes his mind before joining the conspiracy against Hitler. For this point, see also Larry R. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, Studies in Christian Ethics (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972; repr., Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Wells, "Bonhoeffer"; and Schmitz, "Reading Discipleship and Ethics Together." For an excellent summary of Bonhoeffer's pacifism and the other-worldly thinking as expressed in *Discipleship*, see Kelly B. Geffrey and John D. Godsey, editor's introduction to the English edition of *Discipleship*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, DBWE 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 1–33. See also Rasmussen, "Pacifism and Tyrannicide," part 2 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 94–148.

4. Schmitz, "Reading Discipleship and Ethics Together," 153.

5. The five defining moments in Bonhoeffer's life that I will examine closely are: (1) a moment of conviction—in 1939 Bonhoeffer chooses to return to Germany from the safe haven of New York, knowing he will be risking his life in doing so; (2) a moment of shifting—when Bonhoeffer's stance of strict pacifism transitioned due to France's surrender to Germany in 1940 and Bonhoeffer's realization that no one outside Germany was going to rescue them from Hitler; (3) a moment of conspiracy—when Bonhoeffer chooses to lead a double life as an agent of the German government and a member of the underground resistance; (4) a moment of reckoning—when, in Tegel Prison, Bonhoeffer wrestles with the decisions he has made and their consequences; and (5) a moment of

This method of analysis is especially cognizant of the historical and contextual nature of the task of ethics, and it demonstrates the need to turn from prior underdeveloped Catholic receptions of Bonhoeffer to a more comprehensive approach which brings Bonhoeffer directly into the U.S. Catholic context. Therefore, this chapter in particular will serve as an example of the way in which Catholic theologians need to engage with the full scope of Bonhoeffer's work, biography, and context in order to attain a fuller (and, therefore, more useful) understanding of his legacy. As such an example, this chapter also critically examines the theological foundations of an ethics that has the capacity to move beyond rigid codes of behaviors or legalistic tendencies to an ethics that is contextually flexible and relevant to personal experience. Such an approach to ethics is necessary because it fosters an ability to recognize when religious doctrine, ritual, or rhetoric is being hijacked by political entities, such as was done by Hitler in Nazi Germany and as is being done currently in the U.S. by Trump and Alt-right pundits. Bonhoeffer refers to times in history such as these as moments "which confront us with concrete problems, set us tasks and charge us with responsibility."[6]

## Section A: Bonhoeffer and Fragmentation

### Hermeneutical Considerations

This chapter relies on writings of Bonhoeffer which can largely be categorized as informal (as compared to writing which is formally prepared for scholarly publication). It is widely known that Bonhoeffer's book *Ethics* was unfinished at his death. However, Eberhard Bethge also suggests that what has been published under the title *Ethics* represents four different

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fulfillment—also during Bonhoeffer's time in prison—when he communicates his lack of regrets for his life and actions.

6. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 88.

attempts that Bonhoeffer makes to explain his ethics.[7] Therefore, Bethge explains that in actuality, *Ethics* is a collection of "fragments consisting of several approaches fitted together."[8]

Additionally, as is indicated by its title, *Letters and Papers from Prison* consists of personal correspondence, notes, and poems. Therefore, it is important to remember that neither *Ethics* nor *Letters and Papers from Prison* were explicitly meant for publication in the form in which they exist now. Despite this, *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* are prominent among the corpus of writings that scholars use to identify and interpret Bonhoeffer's theological and ethical constructs, and, as such, both are widely acknowledged as authoritative scholarly sources. Nevertheless, the informal and unpolished nature of these publications necessitates a nuanced approach to the study of Bonhoeffer's writings.

Additionally, the uniqueness[9] of these writings—their informal, incomplete, and unpolished nature—lends itself to a non-traditional investigative approach, such as one which seeks to identify crucial moments of decision-making as a way to formulate Bonhoeffer's ethical foundations, versus an approach which would seek to identify a logically progressive

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7. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 622.

8. Bethge, 622.

9. I use the word "unique" here in the sense that both *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* were published posthumously. The writings in *Letters and Papers from Prison* were not conceived of as scholarship, nor were they intended for publication by the author. Similarly, *Ethics* was an incomplete collection of writing that *was* intended for eventual publication; however, it was still in draft form at Bonhoeffer's death. Similar collections of writing (letters, notes, drafts) exist, such as in the case of Simone Weil or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It is also important to note here that taking these forms of writing seriously as scholarship challenges traditional ideas about what constitutes academic and scholarly theology—and doing so is part of my overall project of contributing to the development of a theology of fragmentation and a theological ethics that takes contextual ambiguity seriously.

development in Bonhoeffer's thought predominantly characterized by continuity in conceptual frameworks.

Understanding the concept of fragmentation from a broader perspective is also important to following this chapter's investigation of Bonhoeffer's writings. While chapter 4 will provide a more detailed look at the origins and characteristics of the concept of fragmentation, for the purposes of this chapter, a brief introduction will do. Fragmentation can be traced back to the secularization of Western society, which began with schism in the Roman Church during the Reformation Period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[10] Followed by the collapse of a unified Christendom, along with the disintegration of feudalism as a viable economic structure, Post-Enlightenment European society shifted to a governmental model that embraced the juridical separation of church and state. [11] In addition, the rise of civil revolution as a popular movement for social and political change brought about new forms of government, which embraced the further differentiation of key social and political constructs. Whereas the main structures of Western society (government, religion and morality, economy, culture, etc.) were conjoined under Medieval Christendom, they became separated into distinct areas of functionality and jurisdiction in the modern age. This compartmentalization (or fragmentation) of society in the late nineteenth and early

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10. This understanding of the origins of fragmentation is specifically sociological. Sociological theories which argue that modern society has been "fragmented" are predominantly grounded in the work of three nineteenth century sociologists: Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber. See Michele Dillon, *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), for an excellent overview of these theorists.

11. Christendom is understood as the synergistic model of government, operative in Medieval Europe, which conjoined the Christian Church and national sovereignty.

twentieth centuries effected a shift in the nature of the relationships between various social structures.[12]

Bonhoeffer's use of the word "fragmentation" more specifically reflects his experience of life in Germany under the political and military dominance of Nazism in the early twentieth century. During this time, Germany experienced the large-scale shifts of secularization and societal fragmentation that all of Western civilization underwent. However, Germany's particular experience of religious schism was intensified by the ethical conflicts which arose between Christians in reaction to Nazi ideology.[13] The unity of Lutheran thought and tradition disintegrated in the wake of various reactions to the Nazi Party, which used a combination of secularized Christian doctrine and *volkish* sentimentality to create a generically religious ideology aimed at amassing German followers.[14] Reflecting on the situation, Bonhoeffer states:

> We cannot hate [death] as we used to…. Fundamentally we feel that we really belong to death already, and that every new day is a miracle. It would probably not be true to say that we welcome death … we are too inquisitive for that—or, to put it more seriously, we should like to see something more of the meaning of our life's broken fragments.[15]

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12. Dillon, *Introduction to Sociological Theory*, chaps. 1–3.

13. See Clifford J. Green, editor's introduction to the English edition of *Ethics*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, DBWE 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 1–44, for a useful and concise description of Germany's socio-political setting in the 1920s through the 1930s and the impact this had on German Christianity.

14. For a comprehensive explanation of Nazi ideology (including a detailed description of the aspects of volkish religiosity, Christianity, and Hitler's racist theory of Arianism) see Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*.

15. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* [1972], 16.

As noted in the Introduction, Bonhoeffer is well-known for his participation in a plot to kill Hitler that ultimately resulted in his execution in April, 1945 at a Nazi concentration camp in Flossenbürg. Although the narrative of Bonhoeffer's participation in the German underground[16] resistance and death is very important, any study of Bonhoeffer conducted today must acknowledge and differentiate from the Bonhoeffer of popular opinion. Therefore, this chapter adopts two specific approaches in order to distinguish Bonhoeffer the theologian from Bonhoeffer the legend. Firstly, this chapter uses direct quotes from primary sources, and—when not using direct quotes—employs language specifically meant to mirror Bonhoeffer's own language. This strategy aims to present an understanding of Bonhoeffer that is congruent with who he was in his lifetime.

Secondly, and most importantly, Bonhoeffer's writings are understood in this chapter as reflections of a *wartime* theology (i.e. a contextually specific theology). In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer asserts that concrete ethical problems define his generation, thus making theoretical and abstract approaches to ethics impossible.[17] He explains, "This leads us away from any kind of abstract ethic and towards an ethic which is entirely concrete. What can and must be said is not what is good once and for all, but the way in which Christ takes form among us here and now."[18] The concrete and ethical problem with which Bonhoeffer wrestled is Nazi ideology and war in Germany.

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16. The use of the word "underground" indicates the resistance activities which Bonhoeffer undertook conspiratorially. Until the French surrender to Germany in 1940, there were various ways to openly, albeit dangerously, resist the Nazi regime. However, once Hitler's military endeavors proved to be successful, the mode of resistance changed to one of secrecy. This will be explained further later in the chapter.

17. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 66.

18. Bonhoeffer, 87.

It is also important to note that although there are several concepts within Bonhoeffer's writings that can be identified as significant to an overall understanding of Bonhoeffer's ethical framework, the scope of this chapter is too short to engage them all. Therefore, the discussion in this chapter (as with subsequent chapters) is selective about both the writings and the topical foci. For example, this chapter will not engage dialogue about the central topics of cheap versus costly grace, religionless Christianity, or Christian pacifism—all of which are essential for a comprehensive study of Bonhoeffer's ethics.[19] As popular strands of discussion in Bonhoeffer scholarship, there already exist wide-ranging investigations of these issues and they are topics that deserve more attention than can be given within the limits of this project.

## Continuity and Discontinuity

In his essay, "Reading Discipleship and Ethics Together: Implications for Ethics and Public Life," Florian Schmitz points out that there has always been great interest in Bonhoeffer's theological development, including questions about the unity of his work. Schmitz explains that although there have been various answers to the questions raised about the continuity/discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's writings, "there is still general agreement on one matter: many researchers have compared *Discipleship* and *Ethics* and concluded that, with his decision in support of the conspiracy, Bonhoeffer retreated from *essential* theological concepts" that were

19. Cheap versus costly grace is an important theory proposed by Bonhoeffer in *Discipleship*, while religionless Christianity is an idea he develops in his letters to Eberhard Bethge, now published in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. The issue of whether Bonhoeffer shows continuity or discontinuity in his thought concerning Christian pacifism (which he first addresses in *Discipleship* and subsequently in a less direct ways in *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*) is an important debate within Bonhoeffer scholarship. For recent work on this debate see Mark Thiessen Nation, Anthony G. Siegrist, and Daniel P. Umbel, *Bonhoeffer the Assassin? Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2013). For a more classic treatment, see Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*.

present in *Discipleship*.[20] The essential theological concepts to which Schmitz refers here are Bonhoeffer's embrace of strict pacifism in the face of evil and violence, and Bonhoeffer's early emphasis on a two-realm reality. Many scholars, including Bethge and Rasmussen, who published a definitive study on Bonhoeffer's theology in 1973, titled *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, argue that these are two points over which Bonhoeffer changes his mind before joining the conspiracy against Hitler. However, Schmitz himself argues that "Bonhoeffer's work is much less inconsistent … than has been assumed up until now."[21]

Although Bethge and Schmitz disagree about the level of continuity versus discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's thinking, both emphasize the significance of the "way of thinking that leads Bonhoeffer to his answers" [22] instead of the details of Bonhoeffer's actions themselves. Thus, Bethge and Schmitz share an essential understanding about Bonhoeffer: it is his method, the way he goes about ethics and theology, that is key to understanding his writings.

Schmitz explains that "Bonhoeffer develops contextual theology by getting involved in new situations, and by questioning, updating, and continually developing … theological convictions that pervade his entire work."[23] He points out that Bonhoeffer possessed a "tremendous ability to update his theology" as prompted by specific and unrepeatable historical situations.[24]

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20. Schmitz, "Reading Discipleship and Ethics Together," 147.

21. Schmitz, "Reading Discipleship and Ethics Together," 147.

22. Schmitz, 153.

23. Schmitz, 153.

24. Schmitz, 153.

Schmitz's assessment that there is a fundamental aspect of continuity in Bonhoeffer's thinking acknowledges that Bonhoeffer does develop and change the specific ways in which he expresses this consistent ethic over time. Therefore, it is important to examine both the underlying continuity of Bonhoeffer's ethic and the process through which Bonhoeffer changed his thinking about this consistent ethic over time while also being especially cognizant of the historical and contextual nature of the task of ethics.

## Section B: Fragments and Moments

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer argues that there are specific moments in history "which confront us with concrete problems, set us tasks and charge us with responsibility."[25] This section will examine five such moments for Bonhoeffer. Samuel Wells' 2013 essay "Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Activist, Educator: Challenges for the Church of the Coming Generations" will be helpful in this examination, as Wells identifies three significant turning points (or defining moments) in Bonhoeffer's life that are comparable to moments of development in Bonhoeffer's ethics.

Wells grounds the content of his essay in a distinction he makes between "two important small words, 'for' and 'with.'"[26] Wells explains:

> Dietrich Bonhoeffer has been, I suggest, remembered mostly as a man 'for' others. He wrote theology *for* the academy, he stood up *for* the Jews, He spoke up and established a seminary *for* the Confessing Church, he joined the bomb plot *for* Germany's salvation. But I believe he should be perhaps even more remembered as a man 'with' others. At three defining moments in his life, he resolved that to be a faithful disciple meant to be *with* God by being *with* God's church, by being *with* his people, and by being *with* his family, friends, trusted companions, and fellow conspirators.[27]

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25. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 88.

26. Wells, "Bonhoeffer," 220.

27. Wells, 220 (emphasis in original).

The following sections build on the three turning points in Bonhoeffer's life identified by Wells by adding two more moments of crucial decision-making. These moments will exemplify what Wells has called Bonhoeffer's "being with" others.

## Moment of Conviction: 1939 Return to Germany

Wells argues that the first defining moment in Bonhoeffer's life took place in 1939, at which time Bonhoeffer's friends and colleagues had made arrangements for him to stay in New York, safe from what was quickly becoming the time of greatest persecution in Germany. The Executive Secretary of the Federal Council of Churches created a job for Bonhoeffer to coordinate work among German refugees in New York City for a term of three years.[28] Bonhoeffer wrestled over whether or not he should take this opportunity in New York or return to Germany, where he would almost certainly be called up for active military duty. He discussed his dilemma with his good friend, George Bell, bishop of Chichester, England. Wells asserts that:

> What Bell was helping Bonhoeffer to see was that there was no solution to his predicament, either in an appointment outside Germany or in simply consenting to being called up [to military service]. Instead he was going to have to live without a solution. He was called to find a way to be 'with' his people, not in dramatic and conclusive decision, but in an extended series of daily discernments. Only thus was he going to imitate how God is 'with' us.[29]

Although Bonhoeffer did initially go to New York with the intention of accepting the appointment offered by the Executive Secretary of the Federal Council of Churches, he decided to return to Germany within weeks of his arrival. Wells references an oft-

28. Wells, 221.

29. Wells, 223.

quoted excerpt from a letter Bonhoeffer wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr explaining his decision. Reflecting the influence of Bell's words on his thinking, Bonhoeffer wrote,

> I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people. Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilisation may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilisation. I know which of these alternatives I must choose: But I cannot make the choice in security![30]

This quote reflects well an important aspect of Bonhoeffer's thought process as he considered whether or not to return to Germany in 1939. His letter to Niebuhr reveals that Bonhoeffer had come to the crucial realization that there was no clear "right" or "wrong" answer to his predicament. In his decision to return to Germany, Bonhoeffer knew that he would continue to confront this reality of uncertainty as a daily part of life.

## Moment of Shifting: France's Surrender to Germany, 1940

The surrender of France to German forces on June 17, 1940 was a definitive blow for the Nazi resistance movement inside Germany. Not long after France's surrender, the network of resistance allies, both inside Germany and abroad, fractured apart and forced anyone still willing to resist Nazi domination into a new underground stronghold.[31] Bethge explains that France's surrender represented the opposite of what had been expected to happen in Hitler's mad charge across Europe. Wells adds that "what the moment really meant for Bonhoeffer was that he and his circle were confronted with the horrifying truth that no one was going to

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30. Wells, 223, ultimately quoting from Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Richard Niebuhr, New York, July 1939, in *The Way to Freedom: Letters, Lectures, and Notes; 1935–1939*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. Edwin Robertson, trans. Edwin Robertson and John Bowden, Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer 2 (London: Collins, 1966), 246.

31. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 586.

get rid of Hitler for them. If they wanted Hitler gone, they would have to do it themselves."[32] All previous dreams of dislodging the hated Nazi regime were shattered in this one moment.

"The victory in France had set the seal on an immense miscalculation" that Hitler's methods and his "estimate of the enemy" would be unsuccessful.[33] In the world's eyes, this took credibility away from the judgment and plans that the internal resistance movement had for taking down the Nazi regime. As a result, the movement lost its international network of allies.[34] This regime of evil and death was going to be in power much longer than the resistance movement had estimated. In the moment of France's surrender, Bonhoeffer knew immediately that their ways of resisting had to change.[35] Bethge identifies this as the moment when Bonhoeffer's double life began. Bonhoeffer would now employ deception in his resistance to Nazism.[36]

Bethge also identifies this as the moment when Bonhoeffer began writing his book on ethics, which he had intended to publish eventually under the title *Ethics*.[37] The sixth edition of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, edited by Bethge, identifies a chronological account of when major sections (different approaches) of the book were composed. The sections which Bonhoeffer

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32. Wells, 224.

33. Wells, 224.

34. Bethge, 586.

35. Bethge, 587.

36. Bethge, 585.

37. Eberhard Bethge, editor's preface to the 6th German ed. of *Ethics*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 16. This preface was authored in July 1962.

wrote over the course of 1939 and 1940 are titled "The Love of God and the Decay of the World" and "The Church in the World."

Bonhoeffer began the former, according to Bethge, the first essay he wrote for *Ethics*, with the intention of discrediting the notion that the task of Christian ethics is to distinguish between good and evil.[38] Bonhoeffer argued that it is the knowledge of good and evil (first acquired by Adam and Eve in the garden) that constitutes the essential disunity between humans and God, who is their origin.[39] Further, he contends that this knowledge of good and evil fractured not only the unity between humans and God, but also the unity between one human person and another, as well as a person's relationship with oneself.[40]

Bonhoeffer points out that the disunity caused by the Edenic fall can only be healed through the work of love.[41] However, Bonhoeffer's concept of love is distinct from the common human understanding of love as attachment to and/or romantic attraction to another human. For Bonhoeffer, *God* himself is love. It is crucial to understand that Bonhoeffer's emphasis here is on the word 'God' and not the word 'love.'

Love is not one characteristic of God among others. God in God's own existence *is* love. Therefore, only God can know what love is, and "only he who knows God knows what

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38. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 21.

39. For further explication of his theory, see Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 21–24. Bonhoeffer's theological exposition of the creation narratives as published in *Creation and Fall* will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

40. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 28–29.

41. Bonhoeffer, 52.

love is."[42] Furthermore, Bonhoeffer points out that "no one knows God unless God reveals Himself to him. And so no one knows what love is except in the self-revelation of God. Love, then, is the revelation of God. And the revelation of God is Jesus Christ."[43]

Thusly, Bonhoeffer asserts that it is through knowing Jesus that humans come to know what love is.[44] Over the centuries since Jesus' life and death, people have come to know Jesus through the Second Testament.[45] Bonhoeffer points out that the Second Testament does not simply consist of the name "Jesus Christ" written over and over.[46] Rather, the Christian gospels communicate Jesus, who is love, "displayed in events, concepts, and principles which are intelligible to us."[47] Therefore, Bonhoeffer argues, in biblical terms we can answer the question of what is love with the answer that love is the actions and attitudes taken by Jesus Christ for the task of reconciling the world with God.[48]

Bethge points out that in this section of *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer still uses the language of *Discipleship* (his most recently published book at the time). However, Bethge also uncovers points of emphasis on concepts that later become key to Bonhoeffer's overall ethics.[49] For

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42. Bonhoeffer, 53.

43. Bonhoeffer, 53.

44. Bonhoeffer, 54.

45. Christian circles typically refer to this collection of scripture as the "New Testament"; however, using the title "Second Testament" is the attempt of some Christian and Jewish scholars to erase the supersessionism inherent to the former title.

46. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 54.

47. Bonhoeffer, 54.

48. Bonhoeffer, 55.

49. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 622; the original German title of the book is *Nachfolge*, that is, simply *Discipleship*. However, in the first English edition, itself an abridgement, the title was

example, Bonhoeffer writes at the end of his essay on the church and the world that "the question which is set us *by our experience and by our own time*, the question of what is meant by saying that the good find Christ, in other words the question of the relationship of Jesus Christ to good people and to goodness."[50] As highlighted in this quote with italics, it is clear that Bonhoeffer is already referring to the concreteness of the situation as the proper context for ethics. He also alludes here to the validity of individual experience as a source for theology.

Bonhoeffer goes on to address the question of Jesus' relationship to good people and goodness by offering a scathing critique of the common understanding of the words "success" and "good," and of the fact that these words are always exclusively associated with each other.[51] Here, Bonhoeffer introduces readers to the foundation of his theology of the cross, a Christology which comes "from below:" "The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard," for "it was precisely the cross of Christ, the failure of Christ in the world, which led to His success in history."[52]

In these quotes, we begin to see how it is Bonhoeffer's Christology that provides the fundamental continuity in his ethics over time. Bonhoeffer came to understand that the proper path of the Christian disciple is not one of conformity to universally good actions. The right or good decision to make cannot be determined ahead of time in a world of

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changed to *The Cost of Discipleship* (trans. R. H. Fuller (London: SCM Press, 1948)). More recent English editions, including the one cited in this paper, use the original title, *Discipleship*.

50. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 63 (emphasis added).

51. Bonhoeffer, 78; see also pp. 77–78 for Bonhoeffer's detailed critique of success.

52. Bonhoeffer, 78–79.

constantly shifting circumstances. Therefore, Christian ethics consists in considering, in different circumstances, how to act in congruence with Jesus' actions. As a model for reading Bonhoeffer's own work by recognizing the shifting historical conditions in which he wrote, this statement contains implications for readers of Bonhoeffer, as we saw in the first chapter. The next section will discuss in more detail Bonhoeffer's ethical call to "conform" to Jesus Christ.

## Moment of Conspiracy: A Double Life

In his well-known biography of Bonhoeffer, Bethge addresses the reluctance of some scholars to label Bonhoeffer as a "conspirator" because of the negative connotation that usually accompanies this word. However, Bethge points out that it is only now, in more orderly times of history, that such reluctance could emerge. Bethge also asserts that refusing to use the word "conspirator" to describe Bonhoeffer simply amounts to covering up what actually happened in the "exceptional reality" in which he lived.[53]

Bethge also provides a detailed summary of Bonhoeffer's role and tasks within the conspiracy.[54] Bonhoeffer's involvement in the conspiracy began when he was hired by the German Secret Service, *Abwehr*. Although Bonhoeffer's position at *Abwehr* was originally the result of a scheme to prevent him from being called into active military service, it was also the perfect cover for the headquarters of the underground resistance. Bonhoeffer's official role at *Abwehr* was to collect information about the ecumenical movement that could be useful to the German government and war effort. This provided a suitable cover for Bonhoeffer to

53. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 696.

54. See Bethge, 628–689, for in depth descriptions of Bonhoeffer's involvement in the underground resistance movement led by *Abwehr*.

conduct travel abroad in order to perform tasks for the underground movement.[55] Bethge explains that, in this sense, Bonhoeffer had to be become a "double agent."[56]

Bethge goes to lengths to explain *why* Bonhoeffer chose to participate in "a conspiracy that would carry camouflage and disguise to extreme limits" [57] and what it meant for Bonhoeffer's life by pointing out that the resistance movement found itself in the "worst of the worst" situations.[58] As addressed in the previous section, the success of Hitler's military advances shattered the public resistance movement into pieces. Anyone who publicly resisted Hitler or the war (including conscientious objectors to military service) was imprisoned and, in most cases, executed. International allies who had heretofore supported the resistance movement (and their plan to mastermind a *coup* of the German government) withdrew their support from the movement and focused instead on the total military defeat of Germany. The resistance movement was then faced with the choice of abandoning all resistance efforts, which many did (especially those in top military or government positions) or change their tactics. Bonhoeffer and his fellow resisters had no choice but to go underground.[59]

Unfortunately, as Bethge points out, adopting conspiracy as the mode of resistance meant that a "price had to be paid."[60] Because conspirators had to maintain the cover that they were committed followers of Hitler, many had to maintain "incriminating" posts within the

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55. Bethge, 688.

56. Bethge, 688.

57. Bethge, 699.

58. Bethge, 699.

59. Bethge, 699.

60. Bethge, 699.

military service, Nazi government, or even in the Schutzstaffel (i.e., the SS, Hitler's and the Nazi party's most vicious paramilitary organization, which was responsible for the operation of concentration camps).[61] Wells quotes Edwin Robertson to describe the process that led Bonhoeffer to the path of conspiracy: "His involvement in the conspiracy would require the abandoning of much that Christian life demands—expert lying built up gradually into closely woven deception, and ultimately the willingness to kill."[62]

It is not surprising that it was during this time that Bonhoeffer wrote the sections of *Ethics* entitled "Ethics as Formation" and "History and the Good." In the former section, Bonhoeffer criticizes ethical frameworks that are based on a set of laws or that are grounded in absolute principles, such as reason, duty, and conscience.[63] He asserts that it is through these various ethical approaches that so many people unwittingly become agents of evil. Bonhoeffer explains: "Reason, moral fanaticism, conscience, duty, free responsibility and

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61. Bethge, 699.

62. Wells, "Bonhoeffer," 224, drawing from Edwin Robertson, *The Shame and the Sacrifice: The Life and Martyrdom of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: MacMillian, 1988), 174, who himself had turned to Mary Bosanquet, *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 219.

63. By placing the concepts reason, duty, and ethics together here and only briefly mentioning them, I do not mean to imply that Bonhoeffer conflates these important ideas or that he does not see them as meaningful. Bonhoeffer dedicates time in *Ethics* to each of these concepts, each with its own definition and understanding but it is outside the scope of this work to get into these concepts in detail here. I also do not mean to imply that reason, duty, and conscience are historically or contextually determined (nor do I think Bonhoeffer is implying that). Bonhoeffer did not think that any of these things were influenced by context. Rather, Bonhoeffer is pointing out that these are integral characteristics of the human person that were gifted to humans by God and intended to be used in the service of God and others. However, Bonhoeffer's critique is that these characteristics are vulnerable to corruption and misuse, such as by nefarious pseudo-religious political forces who were hijacking Christian and nationalistic sentiment for evil purposes. Therefore, Bonhoeffer understands that human faculties alone cannot lead the way to that which is good and right and just, we also have Christ. We must conform to Christ.

silent virtue, these are the achievements and attitudes of a noble humanity. It is the best of men who go under in this way."[64]

This quote reveals how Bonhoeffer's overall ethical thinking is consistently grounded in his Christology. When referring to Bonhoeffer's "Christology," I am referring to a radically incarnational Christology that develops and operates in, for, and from the world. Ironically, this is exactly why humans can live in the world *etsi Deus non daretur*. For it was through the incarnation that Christ revealed to humans how to live in the world as God would.

Recall that in "The Love of God and the Decay of the World," the section of *Ethics* which was purportedly written first, Bonhoeffer explains that it was the apprehension of the knowledge of good and evil by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden which fractured human relationships. Bonhoeffer further explains that it is only the love that *is* Jesus Christ which can mend this rupture. Therefore, human ideas about acting good are necessarily misgiven.

In "History and the Good," which was written "during the climax of [Bonhoeffer's] activity in the conspiracy," [65] Bonhoeffer presents the core of his ethical framework using the categories of goodness, responsibility, and deputyship. As to the first of these categories, Bonhoeffer contends that there is no such thing as goodness in the way that humans have understood it as an abstract conception or a reality in the world. According to him, the responsible person does not seek that which is good based on their own knowledge. As explained above, good is only found in the embodied action of the form of Christ in different

64. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 69.

65. Bethge, preface to the 6th German ed. of *Ethics*, 17.

circumstances. The responsible person, therefore, instead of seeking that which is good, seeks the will of God, which directs them as to what their actions and attitudes should be.[66]

Bonhoeffer has a distinct understanding of the will of God. In his understanding, God's will is not universal or communal, as are most ethical codes. For example, the Decalogue identifies behaviors and attitudes that humans should model. Unlike an ethical framework that universalizes laws, in Bonhoeffer's concept, God's will is diverse and contextual working from within individual circumstances and human beings. Bonhoeffer explains that "responsible action … is not justified by any law; it is performed … in ignorance of good and in the surrender to God … for it is God who sees the heart, who weighs up the deed, and who directs the course of history."[67]

For Bonhoeffer, "responsibility is fundamentally a matter of deputyship."[68] A deputy is a person who acts in the place of others, and on their behalf. Bonhoeffer identifies Jesus as the model of deputyship. He attests to the gospels for support, as they tell the stories of how Jesus acted, worked, cared, interceded, fought, and suffered for others.[69] Biblical scholarship that Bonhoeffer, as well as theologians throughout history, relied on for understanding the gospels includes the recognition that the scriptures themselves do not reflect a continual linear progression of thought. Instead, the Bible consists of many pieces of writing, some complete and others incomplete, brought together in one collection. The books of the Bible

66. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 209.

67. Bonhoeffer, 245.

68. Bonhoeffer, 221.

69. Bonhoeffer, 222.

themselves reflect different moments of history and the lives of significant religious figures, including fragments of information about Jesus' life and death.[70]

Using words that seem to have been plucked directly from the pages of the first volume of Han Urs von Balthasar's theological trilogy, *Seeing the Form*,[71] Bonhoeffer explains that deputyship is the way in which Christ has taken form in the world. Thus, deputyship and responsibility are a matter of becoming the form of Christ, which is the proper content of Bonhoeffer's ethics. The central assertion of Bonhoeffer's ethics is that ethics *is* formation.

Bonhoeffer explains that formation is not the application of specific Christian principles to the world; on the contrary, "formation comes only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ. It comes only as formation in His likeness, as *conformation*."[72] The goal of forming persons into the form of Christ is to develop them into responsible persons, who can apprehend the will of God in the various circumstances of life and act in a way that embodies Christ.

> Ethics as formation, then, means the bold endeavor to speak about the way in which the form of Jesus Christ takes form in our world, in a manner which is neither abstract nor casuistic, neither programmatic not purely speculative. Concrete judgements and decisions will have to be ventured here. Decision and action can here no longer

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70. For an excellent overview of these topics, see Marielle Frigge, *Beginning Biblical Studies*, rev. ed. (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2013). For more extensive expositions, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) and Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979; repr., Minneapolis, 2011), which provides an in-depth examination of the Hebrew Scriptures as religious literature.

71. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Marikakis, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982).

72. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 81.

> be delegated to the personal conscience of the individual. Here there are concrete commandments and instructions for which obedience is demanded.[73]

Bonhoeffer's point is that ethics is something you *do*, not something you cognitively discern and formulate into principles or laws.

Therefore, in order to understand Bonhoeffer's decision to participate as a conspirator in a plot to kill Hitler, we must adopt his perspective, where God's will is a contextually diverse and individualized reality,[74] and where active participation in that reality is the definition of ethics. Bonhoeffer's understanding of how to participate in this reality is to act in conformation to Christ in the various situations one encounters throughout life.

## Moment of Reckoning: Tegel Prison

> We still love life, but I do not think that death can take us by surprise now. After what we have been through the war, we hardly dare to admit that we should like death to come to us, not accidentally and suddenly through some trivial cause, but in the fullness of life and with everything at stake. It is we ourselves, and not outward circumstances, who make death what it can be, a death freely and voluntarily accepted.[75]

The question that all scholars of Bonhoeffer's ethics must address is whether or not his understanding of God's will and ethically responsible behavior as primarily living entities allows for murder to be part of God's will. Did Bonhoeffer's theological ethics justify his actions undertaken within the framework of conspiracy? The underlying foundation of an answer to this question must be the assumption that Bonhoeffer deliberately acted with volition and foresight.

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73. Bonhoeffer, 89.

74. In chapter 3, the characteristics of God as attributed by Bonhoeffer will be explored again in dialogue with Catholic theologian Denis Edwards and his ideas about how God acts in the world.

75. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* [1972], 16.

Bethge explains that not only did Bonhoeffer know exactly what he was doing in the moment, but also that he had predicted that a moment like this would come. Bethge quotes one of Bonhoeffer's own sermons from 1932 where Bonhoeffer told the congregation "that times would come again when martyrdom would be called for."[76] However, Bonhoeffer qualifies: "but this blood … will not be so innocent and clear as that of the first who testified. On our blood a great guilt would lie: that of the useless servant who is cast into the outer darkness."[77]

Earlier in this chapter, Bonhoeffer's decision to return to Germany in 1939 was presented as an important moment of conviction for him. In that moment, Bonhoeffer chose whether he would join Germany in its fate or whether he would watch from the sidelines. Recall that this previous discussion presented the counsel of George Bell as influential to Bonhoeffer as Wells explains:

> what Bell was helping Bonhoeffer to see was that … he was going to have to live without a solution. He was called … to be 'with' his people, not in dramatic and conclusive decision, but in an extended series of daily discernments. Only thus was he going to imitate how God is 'with' us.[78]

Only thus was Bonhoeffer going to actively, ethically participate in the living reality of God's contextually diverse and individualized will. This quote is repeated here to emphasize the fact that in 1939 Bonhoeffer chose uncertainty over abandonment of his community, his nation. Bonhoeffer chose the course of "no solution" because he had faith that no matter what happened, God would be with him. This faith enabled him to return to a land defined not

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76. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 700.

77. Bethge, 700.

78. Wells, "Bonhoeffer," 223.

only by uncertainty, but also by death and destruction. Within that world Bonhoeffer lived out his ethics, his formation in Christ, his *being with* others.

And yet, while Bonhoeffer's actions were no doubt admirable, the question still remains of whether they were willed by God. A definitive answer to this question is uncertain. Bethge points out that "only the true God in the beyond knows whether, at the moment of action, that action has really been taken here in the name of life."[79] "Justification … was for [Bonhoeffer] something that only God could do."[80] In all of the correspondence and notes that came out of Tegel prison, where Bonhoeffer was held from 1943–1944 after his arrest, he does not once try to justify his actions.[81] One could argue that it was the Nazi censor who kept Bonhoeffer from writing anything that would justify his actions. However, Bonhoeffer's correspondence and other writings from Tegel prison indicate otherwise.

In his preface to the sixth edition of *Ethics*, Bethge tells us that the section entitled "The Confession of Guilt" was written while Bonhoeffer was still engaged in the *Abwehr* conspiracy.[82] In this section, Bonhoeffer explains for several pages why "the structure of responsible action includes … readiness to accept guilt."[83] This is one of the first instances where Bonhoeffer presents the idea that in order to act responsibility—as one who has been formed into the form of Christ and lives out the will of God—one must be willing to take on guilt; guilt for their own sins *and* for the sins of others.

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79. Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 700.

80. Bethge, 734.

81. Bethge, 732.

82. Bethge, preface to the 6th German ed. of *Ethics*, 16.

83. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 236.

Bonhoeffer bases his argument that responsible persons must be ready to become guilty on his Christology. The core of Bonhoeffer's Christology is the reality that Jesus Christ, as God's self-revelation of God's nature, is love. Bonhoeffer emphasizes "that it is solely [Jesus'] love which makes Him incur guilt. From his selfless love, from His freedom from sin, Jesus enters into guilt of men and takes this guilt upon Himself."[84] Christ's original and true worldly form is the image of the crucifixion. Therefore, the formation of which Bonhoeffer speaks is conformation into Christ as "the Incarnate, Crucified and Risen One whom the Christian faith confesses."[85] Bonhoeffer describes this conformation: "It is the concept of *faith* that changes with experience. Whoever burdens himself or herself with guilt through a … responsible deed, without regarding one's own life … will have a faith that consists only of surrendering entirely to God while hoping for mercy."[86]

As with Christ, the responsible person's fate is unavoidably guilty. Bonhoeffer explains what this means for the responsible person: "When a man takes guilt upon himself in responsibility, and no responsible man can avoid this, he imputes this guilt to himself and to no one else; *he answers for it*; *he accepts responsibility for it*."[87] This is truly what Bonhoeffer does. Bonhoeffer's ability to take such responsibility is sustained by the same conviction that drove him to return to Germany in 1939: life must be lived uncertainly, but it is not lived alone.

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84. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 237.

85. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 82.

86. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 152.

87. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 244 (emphasis added).

In a letter to Bethge from December 1943, Bonhoeffer argues that "not everything is simply 'God's will'; yet in the last resort nothing happens 'without God's will' … i.e. through every event, however untoward, there is access to God."[88] God is present in all human action, even if those actions are misinterpretations of, or directly contradictory to God's will. Furthermore, the infinite complexity of God's will renders it incomprehensible to humans, who are limited in their bodily and cognitive capacities.[89] Therefore, without the knowledge of the entirety of the will of God, one must rely on one's own decision-making, applied in good faith, toward the work of fulfilling God's will.[90] Whether or not a human's deliberations and actions conform to God's will is only for God to decide. Discernment is key here and it is an important not to miss the full meaning of Bonhoeffer's point: we do not, cannot, know if we have correctly discerned which actions are in conformity with Christ. This is one of the most poignant ways that ambiguity is built into Bonhoeffer's ethical system. We have to discern as best we can and act in good faith. Thus, acting in conformity with Christ always involves the risk of being wrong and the willingness to accept the consequences of one's actions, even to the point of becoming "guilty." However, acting in conformity with Christ also always involves the promise of God's presence with us.

We must not miss Bonhoeffer's key point here. Even when we turn out to be wrong, when one takes responsible action in conformity to Christ, God will still be with them. God

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88. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* [1972], 167.

89. Cf. Barth's theory of the infinite qualitative distinction between humans and God (Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of God*, vol. II, part 2 of *Church Dogmatics*, with Charlotte von Kirschbaum, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957; repr., 1967).

90. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [1995], 230.

will accompany them even through judgment. And, should they be judged guilty, God will be there with them, true to the form of Christ, to help carry that guilt until it be reconciled once and for all. Faith in this promise, the promise of God's grace, empowers Bonhoeffer to take the weight of the sins of Germany's government and its people upon himself and bear it gracefully. Wells affirms: "The fact that Bonhoeffer was not an advocate of his nation's fall did not mean he thought he could avoid its cost. Like Jesus, he bore in his own body the sins of his people. He lived the logic of Christ's incarnation."[91]

## Moment of Fulfillment: Fragments of Faith

The collection of Bonhoeffer's letters and papers from prison communicate some negative experiences; hunger, fear, impatience, bearing the suffering of others around you, and, most intensely for Bonhoeffer, homesickness. However, *all* of Bonhoeffer's experiences, whether good or bad, contributed to the development of his insights and the profound message of his ethics.[92] Additionally, over the course of the eighteen months Bonhoeffer spent in prison, he wrote at least three different letters to friends in which he keenly impresses upon them the fact that he has no regrets—neither for his life in general nor the events that had taken place.[93]

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91. Wells, "Bonhoeffer," 226.

92. Bonhoeffer never felt as if his time in prison was a waste of life, "Nor have I ever regretted my decision in the summer of 1939, for I'm firmly convinced—however strange it may seem—that my life has followed a straight and unbroken course, at any rate in its outward conduct. It has been an uninterrupted enrichment of experience, for which I can only be thankful. If I were to end my life here in these conditions, that would have a meaning that I think I could understand; on the other hand, everything might be a thorough preparation for a new start and a new task when peace comes" (Bonhoeffer to Eberhard Bethge, Tegel, April 11, 1944, in *Letters and Papers from Prison* [1972], p. 32).

93. See also Bonhoeffer to Hans von Dohnanyi, April 5, 1943, p. 32; Bonhoeffer to Bethge, Tegel, December 22, 1943, p. 174; and again Bonhoeffer to Bethge, Tegel, April 11, 1944, p. 272.

He also explains in these letters why he does not feel regret for anything that has happened. In a letter to Bethge from December 1943, he writes: "I can (I hope) bear all things 'in faith,' even my condemnation, and even the other consequences that I fear … but faithless vacillation, endless deliberation without action, refusal to take any risks—that's a real danger."[94] Even when he is imprisoned, accused of treason against his beloved country, unable to help anyone, surrounded by suffering and death, Bonhoeffer clings to his faith. It is through this faith that Bonhoeffer finally comes to understand the basis of his convictions.

> The Christian cannot split up his life or dismember it, and the common denominator must be sought both in thought and in a personal and integrated attitude to life. The man who allows himself to be torn into fragments by events and by questions has not passed the test of the present or the future.[95]

German life had been torn into fragments. Traditional nineteenth century German culture was bulldozed over by the National Socialism of the Nazis. Nazi ideology turned German people against their own compatriots. Europe itself was covered in fragments of buildings destroyed by bombs, with chunks of the earth ripped apart by war, even with bits of human flesh. All communication platforms had collapsed. The business of daily life was shattered, and families were split apart in attempts to escape the dreadful fate that lay ahead for Germany. In several places within *Letters and Papers in Prison*, Bonhoeffer uses the word "fragmentation" to describe this situation. He poignantly asks if "there have ever before in human history been people with so little ground under their feet."[96]

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94. Bonhoeffer to Bethge, Tegel, December 22, 1943, pp. 173–174.

95. Bonhoeffer to Bethge, Tegel, January 20 & 30, 1944, p. 200.

96. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* [1972], 3.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed in a Nazi concentration camp in Flossenbürg on 9 April, 1945. Several of Bonhoeffer's co-conspirators and friends, and three other members of his family were executed on the same day. Bonhoeffer's parents and his fiancée did not find out about his death until months later. Bonhoeffer's life, just like his writings, was unfinished. However, it is crucial to understand that Bonhoeffer himself was not fragmented.

Bonhoeffer was able to aptly catch the mood of his world in Nazi Germany as one that was fragmented by evil and the folly of humanity. However, he did not allow his fragmented reality to tear apart the faith upon which he grounded his life and his theological ethics. This is the promise that Bonhoeffer's ethics offers to Catholics in the United States today. It is through the power of Bonhoeffer's own voice that this can be best explained:

> The important thing today is that we should be able to discern from the fragment of our life how the whole was arranged and planned, and what material it consists of. For really, there are some fragments that are only worth throwing into the dustbin … and others whose importance lasts for centuries, because their completion can only be a matter for God, and so they are fragments that must be fragments…. If our life is but the remotest reflection of such a fragment, if we accumulate, at least for a short time, a wealth of themes and weld them into a harmony in which the great counterpoint is maintained from start to finish, so that at last, when it breaks off abruptly, we can sing no more than the chorale, "I come before thy throne," we will not bemoan the fragmentariness of our life, but rather rejoice in it. … Here, too, is a necessary fragment of life—"but I will give you your life as a prize of war."[97]

## Section C: Not Knowing

This dissertation tackles a rather broad question: What does Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his theological ethics have to offer Catholic Americans today? Using fragmentation as a hermeneutical lens, this chapter presented reflections on a careful reading of parts of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers in Prison*. In this process, another question emerged that is crucial to gaining a comprehensive understanding of Bonhoeffer's ethics. Can

97. Bonhoeffer to Bethge, Tegel, February 23, 1944, p. 219.

we discover through a close and critical reading of Bonhoeffer's writings whether or not he believed that murdering Hitler was God's will? Lacking the vast amount of information that we would need to definitively answer this question (access to the contextually diverse and individualized will of God and a complete publication about ethics from Bonhoeffer) makes it impossible for us to do so. However, the nonanswerability of this question is the answer Bonhoeffer would offer to us for consideration.

We do not know. More than that, in our human limitedness, we *cannot* know. How can Bonhoeffer's ethics be useful if we cannot even determine whether he believed that murder was part of God's plan? Furthermore, how can a theological ethics based on Bonhoeffer be developed based on only fragments of Bonhoeffer's writings? The very uncertainty that underlies these questions is the answer. These fragments must be embraced and engaged as moments of lived ethics. In fact, moments of lived ethics is the heart of what Bonhoeffer has to offer a contemporary ethics of resistance based on a constructive theology of fragmentation.

By moving beyond an understanding of ethics as a continuous linear progression toward the identification of right and wrong, Bonhoeffer's ethics issues a significant challenge to theology today in pointing out that such a pattern for ethics has lost its pertinence in a world defined by fragmentation. In such a world, faith in Jesus Christ as a continuous compass of action must replace certainty lest the fragmentation of society is allowed to tear apart individual souls as well. This kind of faith demands action, the action of conforming to the form of Christ and participating in the work of bringing about the fulfillment of God's will. What each individual person has to offer to this work will vary, and only fragments of the whole picture will each ever be able to understand. However, Christians can find

sustenance in these fragments of the divine will, seeing them as glimpses of the reign of God in the here and now.

The following chapters take the major aspects of Bonhoeffer's theological ethics as discussed in this chapter and place them in dialogue with Catholic theological, sociological, and philosophical strands of thought in order to demonstrate how Bonhoeffer's legacy can be instrumental to a contemporary American theology.

## Conclusion

This chapter marked a significant transition in focus from chapter 1. Chapter 1 critiqued various Catholic authors for failing to take Bonhoeffer's context seriously and for using his work as a prop in their own ideological projects. Shifting significantly in focus, chapter 2 engaged deeply with Bonhoeffer's works as well as his life and historical context. Chapters 3 and 4 will follow the same model as chapter 2.

The Catholic authors reviewed in chapter 1 were critiqued for using Bonhoeffer's works for their own ideological theological systems or contexts. However, Bonhoeffer developed his theology to resist exactly this type of theological "hijacking" in opposition to Nazism in Germany. The rise of the Third Reich precipitated the disintegration of German society, and Bonhoeffer embraced that fragmentation in his theology. Therefore, when looked at through the lens of fragmentation, rather than as a system (or as cogs in other systems), Bonhoeffer's theological works provide a place from which to resist theological and ethical hijacking. Such a theological ethics is crucial is the U.S. Catholic context today.

Today's American Catholics need to encounter Bonhoeffer's embrace of fragmentation and ambiguity in order to confront vestiges of neo-orthodox conservative interpretations of the world that they share with the authors from chapter 1. Thus, exposing the American Catholic

"theological" perspective as actually a totalitarian neo-liberal political campaign. Chapters 3 and 4 will look more closely at these connections.

CHAPTER 3

FRAGMENTS OF GLORY:

WHAT REMAINS AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF CHRISTIAN SYSTEMS

## Chapter Organization

Chapter 3 proceeds in the same structural format as chapter 2. Section A will provide a brief history of relevant ideas leading to a more in depth look at Bonhoeffer's specific context of social upheaval, political oppression, and genocide by examining the theological and sociological antecedents of the rise of National Socialism in Germany (section B).

Both German and American strands of history will interact to display how Western cultures throughout the early twentieth century precipitated a watershed moment for theology that rendered the dominant paradigms of Protestant liberalism and Roman Catholic dogmatism no longer tenable.[1] To say that these events and their consequences for Christian theology are multifaceted and have an enduring dynamic is an understatement. Therefore, this project limits its examination to aspects of these histories that are most influential to a discussion of Bonhoeffer's theological ethics, especially his openness to contextual ambiguity and emphasis on conformation to Christ. As I have been arguing thus far, Bonhoeffer's

1. While it is reasonable to argue that this is a debatable claim, the work in this dissertation makes a case for it relying on the evidence of scholars such as Gary Dorrien, Rainer Bucher, and Hans Kung, and Richard Hughes Seager, among others, as will be discussed in this chapter. Debating the validity of this overall claim is beyond the scope of this project.

fragmented work becomes a pivotal critique of the use of theology for political-ideological ends.

Section C is brings Bonhoeffer's voice to the center of the dialogue and focuses on his incarnational Christology. Two contemporary Catholic thinkers will also help shape the framework of discussion in this section: Mark Lewis Taylor and Peter Admirand.

## Opening Observations

This chapter specifically lays out the backdrop for the development of neo-orthodoxy theology,[2] which emerged early in the 1900s specifically in response to the changing social, political, and religious climate of Western civilization. In particular, this chapter briefly examines the legacy of Protestant liberalism and its pseudo-religious counterparts: the Columbian Myth of America and German National Socialism, arguing that the rise (and fall) of neo-orthodox theology can be understood as a depiction of theology in transition and as an account of the ways in which theology wrestled with itself during the events of the early twentieth century. In this sense, neo-orthodox theology can be understood as fragments of the overarching ideological religious and political systems that led to the rise of a totalitarian government (in Germany) and elitist ideologies in both Germany and the United States.

With the help of scholars Gary Dorrien, Rainer Bucher, Hans Kung, and Richard Hughes Seager, among others, this chapter demonstrates how the theological wrestling of the twentieth century eventually culminates not only in the collapse of these pseudo-religious

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2. This theology has alternately been called dialectic theology, theology of crisis, and Barthian, although, as Gary Dorrien points out, Karl Barth, "the preeminent theologian of the twentieth century" and the name most commonly associated with neo-orthodox theology, "denied that his theology should be called 'neoorthodox' or 'dialectical' or even 'Barthian'" (Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology without Weapons* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 1).

political sentiments (the Columbian Myth of America and German National Socialism), but also in the total collapse of conventional systems of Christian theology.

## Section A: The Rise and Fall of Theological Liberalism

Social ethicist Gary Dorrien identifies the early to middle twentieth century as the heyday of theological liberalism.[3] Emerging in the late eighteenth century from theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Paul Tillich,[4] liberalism became not only the dominant tone of theology, but also the central message being preached from the pulpits. Although its origins were in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century,[5] liberalism also quickly became *the* mainstream Christianity in the United States.

Progressivism is the characteristic insight of liberal theology: the idea that theology should never be static.[6] Liberal thought demands ongoing movement in theology, in its institutional structures, its doctrinal formulations, and its understandings of God; how God acts in the world, and in the lives of individual people.[7] Liberal theologians were concerned with saving the indwelling spirit of God from, on the one hand, the post-Enlightenment

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3. Gary Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900–1950*, vol. 2 of *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 1.

4. In his introduction to his *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (5th ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011)), Alister E. McGrath points out that some scholars prefer to label Tillich as "neo-liberal" to emphasize the fact that his work constitutes more of a new development, rather than a simple reformulation of liberal theological thought. McGrath argues, "Tillich understands the task of modern theology to be to establishing a conversation between human culture and Christian faith … so it correlates the gospel to the modern culture" (83).

5. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 82.

6. Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 36.

7. As will be explained further in chapter 3, the liberal emphasis on the dynamism of theology is something that has been preserved by various contemporary theologies despite the largescale collapse of Christian liberalism. It is also an important aspect of a theology of fragmentation.

response of reasserting rigid orthodoxy in the face of science and technology which disproved traditional Christian cosmology and anthropology, and, on the other hand, the Kantian natural theology that seemed to dismiss notions of the immanence of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Rather, liberalism asserted that truth could not be derived only from scripture (in the case of Protestantism) or tradition (in the case of Roman Catholicism). Subsequently, liberalism established individual reason and experience as important theological authorities.[8]

As Dorrien explains: "The essential idea of liberal theology is that all claims to truth, in theology as in other disciplines, must be made on the basis of reason and experience, not by appeal to external authority." Dorrien further argues that in liberal thinking the second coming of Christ and the kingdom of God were not future events. Contrary to traditional eschatological theories of salvation, liberalism described the coming of the kingdom as a progressive internal process.[9] Alister McGrath points out that this thinking should be considered in line with "the theological program as set out by F.D.E. Schleiermacher, especially in relation to his emphasis upon human 'feeling' and the need to relate Christian faith to the human situation."[10]

As a theological discipline, liberalism represents various attempts to uphold the authority of individual reason and experience, while also maintaining a sense of separation

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8. Dorrien, *Idealism, Realism, and Modernity*, 1.

9. Dorrien, 56.

10. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 82. For more on Schleiermacher's significance to liberal theology, see pp. 69–70.

between human history and revelation history. Liberal theology holds onto revelation as truth, or revealed truth, over and against the "truth" of human history.[11]

Protestant liberalism was closely interconnected with the political and cultural history of the United States, which over the course of the early twentieth century changed from an Anglo-Protestant triumphalist nation that optimistically envisioned perfecting human civilization, to a multicultural, globalized nation sobered by the atrocities of two world wars, genocide, and the threat of nuclear power. Central to this change was the rise and fall of the Columbian Myth. It was Protestant theological liberalism combined with the Columbian Myth which set the crash course that led to theology's watershed moment in America.

In his book, *The World Parliament of Religions*, Richard Hughes Seager provides a detailed explanation of the Columbian Myth. He explains that the Columbian Myth of America, epitomized in the 1983 Columbian Exposition in Chicago,[12] sponsors belief in the ultimate superiority of Western Protestant liberal civilization which drew "upon classical, Christian, and patriotic traditions," and "reflected a triumphalist, universalistic perspective in which ethnocentric Anglo-Protestant ideas and values were filtered through lenses that

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11. While there is so much more to be said about liberal theology, continued exposition of the topic would be tangential to the focus of this chapter. In addition to Dorrien's masterful coverage of liberalism in his two volume work *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, Adolf von Harnack offers a classic liberal theological program in *What is Christianity?*, published lectures delivered at the University of Berlin during the 1899–1900 winter term.

12. The Columbian Exposition, which is referred to today as the World's Fair, took place in Chicago in 1893. Created as a celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's founding of America, the exhibition was designed to reaffirm the historic meaning attributed to Columbus's discovery of America; the dominance and superiority of Western nations. The Exhibition, like other national fairs of the nineteenth century, served primarily as a venue for displaying the progress of American civilization. Chicago was chosen as the location of the Columbian Exposition because it was considered the best representation of progress in the nation due to the fact that it had been completely reconstructed following the great fire of 1871 destroyed most of the city, attracting the world's foremost architects in the bid to rebuild.

rendered their ethnocentricity and racism invisible."[13] This myth grew out of the historical meaning attributed to Christopher Columbus's so-called discovery of America, also known as "the ascendency of the Western powers."[14]

By the late nineteenth century, the United States was a nation burgeoning with progress. The country experienced mass urbanization following the antebellum collapse of the agrarian order, the pacification of the Native American population and closing of the frontier, and theretofore unimaginable advancements in technology, such as cross-country railways.[15] Religion and theology were not exempted from the revolutionizing forces of modern America. Developments in different disciplines, such as Darwinism and evolutionary theory, challenged traditional Christian cosmologies and anthropologies, while newly emerging methods of historical and literary analysis challenged the coherence of biblical texts.[16] The Protestant liberal movement was born out of these developments, aided by the general sense of self-confidence and superiority that characterized much of the nation at the time. Seager affirms that

> Anglo-Protestants, infused with 'progressive post millennialism—the idea that history was moving forward with increasing rapidity toward the dawn of a glorious new era,

13. Catherine L. Albanese and Stephen J. Stein, foreword to *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893*, by Richard Hughes Seager (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), xi.

14. Albanese and Stein, xi. Many strands of thought proceed from the racism implicit in this myth (particularly in the field of critical theory), much more than can be mentioned with appropriate attention here. I recommend two recent publications to explore these themes further: Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019) and Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019).

15. Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 9.

16. Seager, *World's Parliament of Religions*, 9–10.

> propelled by Christianity, democratic institutions, science and technology' remained the undisputed custodians of American culture.[17]

The late nineteenth century also "marked the heyday of the … Christian empires on the international scene."[18] Christianity and the progress of Western civilization were inextricably intertwined by the dawn of the twentieth century. Combined, these entities provided Western Christian citizens with an overinflated sense of manifest destiny and unlimited progress which they believed would soon lead to the perfection of human civilization through the universalization of Christianity and Western culture. The fusion of liberalism with the Columbian Myth of America hinged on this overly optimistic concept of inevitable positive progress. Seager rightly asserts that these were the ideologies of "an era in which the confidence of the Western, Christian nations had not yet been shattered by World War I and the great empires not yet dismantled by the success of the twentieth-century wars of liberation."[19]

Although the First World War challenged the Columbian Myth's exaggerated sense of the divine destiny of Protestant liberalism as that which would bring about the perfect human civilization and harmonious coexistence of all humanity, it took the devastating and horrific events of World War II to affect a total collapse of the myth.[20] In addition to

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17. Seager, 23.

18. Seager, 23.

19. Seager, 10.

20. Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds., *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*, trans. John Bowden (London; SCM Press, 1993), 86.

compromising the power and position of the Eurocentric Christian Church, the two world wars left Europe politically weak and socially unstable.[21]

Possibly most damaging to the Columbian Myth, however, was the realization of what was done to Jewish people as the result of the German nationalistic progressive ideology (not unlike the ideology of the Columbian Myth itself) in which, Christianity was necessarily implicated due to its history of anti-Semitism and the complete failure of Christian churches to oppose Nazism (with few exceptions that include Bonhoeffer).[22] All tolled these developments combined contributed to the failure of the Western Christian hope to universalize.[23]

### Section B: The Theology of Nazism and the "New" Theology

Not all Christian denominations responded to the developments of the late nineteenth

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21. The emergence of Asian and Middle Eastern countries as growing political and economic strengths, as well as the liberation of India and other nations who took the opportunity to throw off colonial powers weakened by the wars, also allowed for the strengthening of various world traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. Küng and Kuschel affirm how these developments contributed to the failure of the Western Christian hope to universalize. What the twentieth century experienced instead was the increasing influence of the other world religions and the advent of Theologies of Religions. In identifying the new characteristics of a postmodern world order, Küng and Kuschel point out that in the wake of the historic events of the twentieth century, Western civilization, once hailed as the bringer of world peace, came under massive criticism. Similarly, the positive energy generated by advancements in science and technology at the beginning of the century, turned to doubt and cynicism in the wake of the bombing of Hiroshima and under the looming threat of nuclear weapons. Polycentrism replaced Eurocentrism as the world's dominating force as globalization and transition in political power structures brought nations in closer relationship with each other. See Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 86–87, 89.

22. Many Jewish scholars and Christian theologians have explored the history of anti-Semitism in Christianity, as well as both Christian and Jewish responses to Nationalism Socialism and the Holocaust. Two good starting places for these dialogues are Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source for Christian Self-Understanding* (New York: Paulist, 2000) and Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?*, updated and expanded ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).

23. Küng and Kuschel, *A Global Ethic*, 88.

century with as much enthusiasm and optimism as Protestant liberalism. At the turn of the century, many European churches were overwhelmed by the "crisis" of secularization.[24] This created a very different tone from the confidence of American Protestant liberalism. The dingy and deadly battlefields of World War I skewed Europe's engagement with modernization into an overall mood of mistrust, scorn, and rejection, especially in Germany, where the loss of the war contributed to palpable sentiments of castigation and destitution. There was a real fear among Europeans that modernization would inevitably entail a disintegration of the social fabric of a nation into the misplaced liberal idealization of the individual. One example of how European nations responded to this tenor was the creation of the National Socialist party in Germany.

In his book, *Hitler's Theology*, Rainer Bucher is very interested in understanding why some influential German Catholic theologians supported Hitler during his rise to power in the 1930s and 40s. Bucher asserts that in opting for Hitler these theologians "were evidently concerned with the 'vitality' of their Catholic Church and its ability to engage with and remain relevant in the present; with the question of how Church can continue to exist in the condition of modernity that has become vexingly plural."[25] Arguing that "all Hitler's modern theories of the state are secularized and bastardized ecclesiological concepts"[26] (i.e. all of Hitler's modern theories of state are hijacked fragments of Christian theology), Bucher suggests that the key to understanding Hitler's theology is comprehending the paradoxical

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24. Chapter 4 connects mass secularization with the postmodern concept of fragmentation in culture and society.

25. Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*, xi.

26. Bucher, xi.

promise he made to the "humiliated" people of Germany. Bucher asserts that the great appeal of Hitler was that he "promised the benefits of modernity (technological progress, social equality, economic growth, betterment of social welfare and foremost unity) without the threats of modernity's demand for pluralism and social disintegration."[27]

As already explained, in the early twentieth century in Germany "the political tradition of Liberalism … had already been eroded before Hitler's rise to power" and the dominant tone of culture in Germany was one of victimization, due in no small part to the sanctions levied at Germany in the aftermath of World War I. The German people felt that they were being unfairly oppressed by the rest of Western civilization.[28] This left the German people and the Church were ripe for a new religion.

Bucher argues that it was Hitler's strategic exploitation of the widespread sense of mistrust and victimization that allowed the Third Reich to rise with little opposition from the majority of Germans. He explains that "Hitler's political project gained power by drawing on religious ideas and reinterpreting them in his own theological way."[29] This exploitation astutely infiltrated Hitler's speeches, which often focused on the reality of subjugation and oppression in which the German people lived.[30] Bucher quotes Hitler: "What we desire is …

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27. Bucher, xvi. What is interesting about Hitler's strategy is that he brings about exactly the opposite of what he promised he could. Although the positive progressivism of Liberal Protestantism may have been eroded before his rise to power, it would take the atrocities perpetrated by Nazi Germany to affect its ultimate demise. Hitler never made good on his promise to bring about "progress without loss." Indeed, Germany, the rest of the world, and theology will all drastically change as a result of World War II.

28. Bucher, xvi.

29. Bucher, xi.

30. Bucher, 61.

our freedom, our security, the securing of our Lebenstraum.[31] It is the securing of our Volk's life itself!"[32] Hitler seduced the German people with the promise of making "the idyll of the *völkischegemeinschaft*" (people's community) a reality.[33] Thus, Hitler launched a pseudo-religious and political campaign which successfully exploited deep wounds within German identity. The way Hitler did this was by building a theological (and political) framework out of fragmented Christian ideas distorted by Hitler's nefarious intentions, thus standing as a cautionary tale about proof-texting theological writings from an ideological point of view.

Bucher points out that another successful maneuver of Hitler's was to take what he saw as most useful from the dominant religious affiliations at the time: Roman Catholicism and *völkisch* religiosity and apply them to his practical political theology. Although Bucher describes Hitler as staunchly anti-Christian, he did value the organizational structure, practicality, and basic totalitarian framework of the Roman Catholic Church. He recognized that it was the Church's dogmatic refusal to engage with the modern world that was holding it back. Like many others at the time, Hitler believed that advancements in science had disproved the content of Christian proclamation and doctrine, making its position in the

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31. *Lebenstraum* was "a policy of Nazi Germany that involved expanding German territories to the east to provide land and material resources for the German people, while driving out Jewish and Slavic people" (Jennifer Murtoff, "Lebensraum," in *Britannica* [online], last modified March 17, 2023, accessed January 28, 2024).

32. Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*, 62.

33. Bucher, 3; Bucher describes German *völkisch* religiosity, a movement developed in modern era Germany, as anti-universalist, conveying general superiority and racist ideology, scientificity, liberation from Christian morality, and claimed an access to Germanic culture before it was overlaid with Judeo-Christian religiosity. Hitler was not officially a follower of *völkisch* religiosity, but he appropriated much of its religious ideas. Central to these are: *völkische Gemeinschaft* (community, specifically the German people as a community) and *Vorsehung* (providence). See p. 8 for further description.

modern world untenable. However, Hitler admired the church's dogmatic commitment to its "truths," and he saw this as a valuable stance for his political ideology to mirror.[34]

The most significant aspect that Hitler took from *völkisch* religiosity was the concept of Providence. Bucher suggests, however, that Hitler was very systematic in engaging the idea of Providence and he points out that "not until after the seizure of power does Hitler dare summon divine succor directly."[35] Once in power, however, Hitler proposed National Socialism as the project of divine Providence. Thus, Hitler attributed his actions to a divinely intended plan to bring about the 'salvation' of the German people.[36] Of course, for Hitler, "salvation" for the German people was different from the traditional Christian concept of salvation. He understood salvation as "giv[ing] back a vision or calling to a humiliated people"[37] through the reinstatement of "the injured divine and hence 'natural' order."[38] Unfortunately, Hitler's concept of the "natural order of people" was grossly racist and only applicable to the German people. In order to render his racist ideology scientifically and socially justifiable, Hitler maintained a stance that was both anti-universalist and non-particularist at the same time.[39]

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34. This is another instance where Bonhoeffer's theology can resist the hijacking of Christian sentiment. Bonhoeffer's overall rejection of dogmatic commitment to a set of truths or rules, as discussed in chapter 2, enabled him to understand and oppose Hitler's real intent from the beginning (unlike most other German Christians).

35. Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*, 51.

36. There is where Bonhoeffer's argument for an ethics grounded in conformation with Christ would be important. Hitler is making a claim to a divine plan without any real interaction or reverence for the divine.

37. Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*, xi.

38. Bucher, 64.

39. Bucher, 64.

The logic of racism is, in many ways, the logic of exclusion. Hitler's divine plan of restoring the natural order intended "salvation" only for the *völkischegemeinschaft*. Others, especially the Jews (those of the non-Aryan race), were excluded. However, Hitler was shrewd enough to understand that if he was openly exclusivist (i.e. particularist), focus would inevitably be given to those who were being excluded, and he did not want this to happen. Therefore, his logic was inherently contradictory. Bucher quotes Hitler as stating in his political testament of February 1945: "I myself have always kept my eye fixed on a paradise which, in the nature of things, lies well within our reach. I mean an improvement of the lot of the German people."[40] This rhetoric reeks of the misguided liberal promise of the reality of achieving the kingdom of God on earth through the globalization of Christianity and Western civilization. McGrath's description of liberalism is helpful to understanding this link: "Liberalism was inspired by the vision of a humanity which was ascending upward into new realms of progress and prosperity."[41] This description helps to highlight one of the most significant critiques of liberalism, which is its exceptionally optimist view of human nature. Both German theologian Karl Barth and American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr shared this critique of liberalism.[42] Barth and Niebuhr are also both considered to play important roles in Bonhoeffer's life.[43]

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40. Bucher, 29.

41. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 83.

42. McGrath, 83.

43. The influence of Barth on Bonhoeffer cannot be overstated and will be examined in the next sections of this chapter. For a comprehensive analysis of Barth's influence on Bonhoeffer's theology, see Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000). Reinhold Niebuhr knew Bonhoeffer from his time studying and teaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York (1930–31).

It is no surprise that in the wake such significant theological misgivings and misuses that the entire discipline experienced major moments of transition in the early twentieth century. These shifts were primarily a response to liberalism, and secondarily an attempt to digest the events which brought about the collapse of the Columbian Myth of America and the parallel fall—out of Protestant liberal idealism in Europe. Indeed, theology *had* to change in the face of the events of the early twentieth century; the social upheaval leading to and resulting from World War I, the Great Depression, the atrocities of concentration camps, the United States' use of the atomic bomb in Japan, and the discovery of nuclear power (which represented a new situation in which humanity actually had the power to destroy itself).[44] Instead of confirming the liberal promise of the globalization of peace through a positive progressivism of Western Christian society, these events brought about what seemed to be the exact opposite of that promise. This meant that a new theology was needed to explain why this had happened. Thus, a "new" theology appeared on the scene dubbed as "neo-orthodoxy."

Neo-orthodox theology has many diverse, but related, theories as espoused by various theologians.[45] However, all expressions of neo-orthodoxy shared two core concepts: "the tasks of overcoming the weaknesses perceived in liberalism and of finding a more adequate way of expressing the gospel of Jesus Christ in the social setting of the twentieth

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44. This grappling with necessary change that theology faced as a field is exactly what we see in Bonhoeffer's theology, which itself has transitions as Bonhoeffer personally encountered suffering caused by atrocity.

45. Some already mentioned include Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr, others include Rudolf Bultmann and Emil Brunner.

century."[46] Neo-orthodox theology broadly discredited key aspects of liberalism, such as the indwelling of God in human persons, divine immanence in human history, and the sense that the world follows a track of inevitable progress toward the kingdom of God. However, neo-orthodoxy did retain some of its liberal antecedents, including the incorporation of historical and literary-critical approaches to biblical studies, the validity of new scientific discoveries, and antipathy toward natural theology.

Neo-orthodox theologians also went in several new directions. For example, neo-orthodoxy reclaimed the utmost authority of God's revelation, as compared to liberalism's embrace of the human religious experience. Such an understanding of revelation situates the possibility of the human knowability of God solely in the agency of God. Humans cannot know God without God willing it to be so. Furthermore, neo-orthodox theologians argued that authentic revelation was contained within Jesus *as he is proclaimed in the Gospels*. Therefore, seeking for the historical figure of Jesus was unnecessary. Similarly, neo-orthodox thinking suggested that the true meaning and direction of human history were obscured from human understanding. Only God knows how God works within creation to bring about the kingdom.

Amidst its variety and through its common threads, neo-orthodoxy itself can be understood as an account of theology's critical engagement with the devastating events of the early twentieth century. Therefore, and in line with a theology of fragmentation, neo-orthodoxy is best understood as a moment in theology, rather than a movement. Albeit a crucial moment for theology, it was short-lived. As such, the writings of neo-orthodox theologians provide us with a "birds-eye" view of how theology wrestled with its own self-

46. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 85–86.

understanding. One example of this bird's-eye view, and perhaps the most recognizable is that of Karl Barth, largely considered the quintessential neo-orthodox theologian.[47]

Karl Barth was concerned with maintaining the ultimate transcendence and sovereignty of God. He opposed the theologically liberal turn that renders individual experience a valid way of knowing God. For Barth, experiential "religious" moments were not even possible for humans without their being granted by God's grace, and, for that matter, God does not choose to communicate with persons in this manner anyway. For Barth, God was neither immanent in creation nor indwelling within the human person. God was completely separated from humans by God's own nature and this gap could not be filled until after the death of a human person.[48]

Barth argues that it is the responsibility of theological dogmatics to hold the institutionalized forms of Christianity true to their own mission, which is primarily composed of teaching, preaching, and catechizing.[49] This is one of the places where we can see how Barth's context has affected the way he understands the nature of God. Most of Germany's theologians, including Barth's professors and mentors, publicly supported Germany's political actions during World War I.[50] However, Barth, personally crushed by seeing his professors and colleagues acting in a way that he considered to be anti-Christian,

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47. See Gary Dorrien's *Barthian Revolt*, which is of the most authoritative sources on Barth's influence on the development of neo-orthodox theology.

48. For a good introduction to major themes in Barth's theology, see R. Michael Allen, *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics: An Introduction and Reader* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012).

49. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. I, part 1 of *Church Dogmatics* (= *CD* I/1), with Charlotte von Kirschbaum, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936; repr., 1963).

50. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 86.

opposed these same actions. Eventually his opposition would lead to his exile in Switzerland. Therefore, Barth's essential (and somewhat startling) critique of the Christian church as preaching and teaching false Christianity extended to all religions in an overall critique of the incommensurability of the nature of God to human systems.[51]

Barth claimed that since there is an infinite qualitative distinction between God and humans, any formulations (religions, doctrines, etc.) that humans come up with to explain the infinite and incomprehensible mystery of God will necessarily be wrong.[52] Barth argues that given the completely sovereign and transcendent nature of God, combined with the inherent unknowability of God, religion and its theologies will always provide an inadequate and somewhat false representation of God.

One of Barth's major contributions to the field of theology in general was his definition of the responsibility of dogmatic theology.[53] Barth emphasized the importance for the church to conduct an ongoing self-examination in order to guarantee that what they are teaching and preaching is congruent with the revelation of God—which came to us in the

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51. Barth, *CD*, I/1.

52. Karl Barth, The Doctrine of God, vol. II, part 1 of *Church Dogmatics* (= *CD* II/1), with Charlotte von Kirschbaum, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957). Dorrien points out the influence of both Luther and Kierkegaard in Barth's thinking here (*Barthian Revolt*, 111–116).

53. Dorrien, *Barthian Revolt*, 71.

person of Jesus Christ.[54] Furthermore, Barth's works to this day are considered the ultimate source for understanding neo-orthodox theology.[55]

Hindsight provides theologians today with the knowledge that Barth was one of the last great systematic theologians, and his *Church Dogmatics* was "one of most significant theological achievements of the twentieth century."[56] But, Barth's was one of the final systematic dogmatics to be published, and it was unfinished at his death.[57] The expansive and comprehensive compilations of a whole system of dogmatics in which all things are interconnected and neatly fitting saw their demise by the middle twentieth century along with the crumbling of monolithic Christian systems. The next and final section of this chapter will examine the relevance for this to Bonhoeffer's work in connection to two contemporary theological thinkers: Peter Admirand and Mark Lewis Taylor.

## Section C: Fragments of the "New" Theology and Glimpses of Glory: Bonhoeffer's Incarnational Christocentrism

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which He looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are His body.
Christ has no body now but yours,

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54. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. I, part 2 of *Church Dogmatics* (= *CD* I/2), with Charlotte von Kirschbaum, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936; repr. 1963).

55. Dorrien, *Barthian Revolt*, 1; McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 76.

56. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 85.

57. McGrath, 85.

> No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
> Yours are the eyes with which he looks
> compassion on this world.
> Christ has no body now on earth but yours.
>
> —St. Teresa of Ávila

In his book *The Theological and the Political*, Mark Lewis Taylor proposes a concept of theological that exists outside, and even in contrast to, the great Christian systems of the twentieth century. Contrasting the theological with the dominant academic theological methods and topics of Western scholars—which he refers to as "guild Theology—Taylor explains that "unlike the dominant ethos of Theology, the major concern of the theological is not transcendence, and its primary language is not doctrine."[58] In response to the possibility of being characterized as "post-theological," Taylor warns that the trend in contemporary scholarship to label disciplines or topics with the antecedent "post-" (such as post-Christian or postsecular) signals "a crisis and transition in the understanding of Theology and of religious expression in contemporary, especially Western, societies."[59] From the perspective of a constructive theology of fragmentation which acknowledges the history of Western religious culture and societal failings briefly outlined above, such a crisis or transition can only be considered a hallmark of good tidings. Peter Admirand points out that for a

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58. Taylor, *Theological and the Political*, xii. Later in the book, Taylor explains further that guild Theology discourse "departs from the theological in two senses. First the primary discursive language of guild Theology, especially in Christian theological institutions of the West, tends to focus on doctrinal loci, traditional topics of God, creation, sin, Christology, Holy Spirit, church, eschatology, and so on, all of which provide an ordering function, its parts drawn from established church formulae, creeds, and the biblical narrative's view of history.… The concerns of the theological may intersect with some discourses of the traditional loci, but doing so is not the distinctive focus of the theological" (12). Taylor references here Alister E. McGrath's *Christian Theology (4th ed. (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006)); I have already cited the* 5th edition of this work many times in this dissertation.

59. Taylor, *Theological and the Political*, xv.

contemporary faith to be judged and matured by embrace of the victims of mass atrocities, "demands a faith position that admits its contradictions, weaknesses, and limitations…. Such steps are crucial for any hope towards forming a viable theodicy language even as the language inevitably incorporates a sense of fissure, discontinuity, mystery, and brokenness."[60] Bonhoeffer records similar insights in his later writings, which deeply reflect that transitions his own theology took as it encountered suffering as witnessed in the experience of Jews in Nazi Germany and his own experience in prison.

*Discipleship*, originally published in 1938, can be understood informally as the record of Bonhoeffer's wrestling with the question: What should Christians do about Nazism? The urgency of Bonhoeffer's message cannot be missed in this text, implying that this book is not so much about constructing a universal model of modern day discipleship as much as it is about sounding the trumpet of doom. Warning that "the time of widespread Christian persecution is coming,"[61] Bonhoeffer displays some of his most passionate sermonizing in *Discipleship*, using it as a fervent appeal to his fellow Christians, and an amassing of

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60. Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity*, 302–303. Later in the book, striking a startling resemblance to the proposition of a constructive theology of fragmentation as presented in the Introduction of this dissertation, Admirand argues that "in order to (re)establish some sense of a stable theoretical framework and methodology, one needs to (re)develop and test a firm but flexible hermeneutical practice that values questions as much as answers; is characterized by an open, reflective, and sobering mind; employs diverse 'textual' analysis, interpretations, and viewpoints; seeks to isolate and determine the sources, influences, and themes within specific passages; in addition to the overriding meaning(s); and can recognize congruities (along with incongruities) in other contexts to argue for a basic (or potentially comprehensive) meaning, structure, narrative, or argument" (232).

61. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, German edition ed. Martin Kuske and Ilse Tödt, English edition ed. Geffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, DBWE 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 142.

conviction for himself.[62] Bonhoeffer's repeated assertions that it is in the recesses of our hearts that we are most likely to betray the will of Jesus and falter on the path of discipleship reflects his own wrestling. But, such an urgent and intense appeal is needed when it is suffering and death to which you call followers. For, he paints a picture of discipleship that is far from enticing.

Despite this reality, Bonhoeffer asserts that the path of Christian discipleship, the road to suffering and death, is the only way to overcome evil, stating that "suffering willingly endured is stronger than evil; it is the death of evil."[63] In a tragic irony, this is how Bonhoeffer most powerfully foreshadows his own fate. Bonhoeffer goes so far in *Discipleship* as to say that "there is no thinkable deed in which evil is so large and strong that it would require a different response from a Christian. The more terrible the veil, the more willing the disciple should be to suffer."[64] This is especially provocative in light of Bonhoeffer's decision later in life to participate in a plot to assassinate Hitler, an action which ostensibly contradicts life as a disciple of Christ. However, as mentioned in chapter 2, there is an underlying consistency in Bonhoeffer's writing that guides his life decisions. Reading this quote from *Discipleship* through Bonhoeffer's consistent theology of the cross and with the knowledge of Bonhoeffer's later assassination at the hands of dominant political powers sheds new light on his meaning. The "response" Bonhoeffer refers to in this quote is connected to the previous one where

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62. It is important to note that in their editorial introduction to *Discipleship*, Kelly and Godsey point out that Bonhoeffer is clear from its outset that "his sole concern is to search not for new battle cries and catchwords but 'for Jesus himself'" (DBWE 4:1).

63. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, DBWE 4:134.

64. Bonhoeffer, 4:134.

Bonhoeffer identifies "suffering willingly" as the proper Christian response to evil. What these quotes really point to is Bonhoeffer's incarnational Christocentrism.

In his book, *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer normalizes the essential experiences of the human person by grounding *all* that is human in Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer points out that instead of identifying only with "perfected" humanity; Jesus "takes human character upon Himself as it is," he "does not seek out the most perfect man in order to unite Himself with him."[65] Bonhoeffer argues that Jesus Christ is not the transfiguration of sublime humanity. Rather, relying on Barth's familiar metaphor, he affirms that Jesus Christ is the "yes" which God addresses to the real man."[66]

However, comparatively, Bonhoeffer also goes to great lengths to explain that the properly Christian response to this "yes" is to abandon the natural inclination of human life as much as possible. Bonhoeffer identifies many normative experiences and tendencies of human life as the path to evil through self-deception; "Reason, moral fanaticism, conscience, duty, free responsibility and silent virtue, these are the achievements and attitudes of a noble humanity. It is the best of men who go under in this way, with all that they can do or be."[67] He also mentions longing for success[68] and the desire to be popular[69] as indications of self-deception and evil.

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65. Bonhoeffer, 4:134.

66. Bonhoeffer, 4:134.

67. Bonhoeffer, 4:69.

68. Bonhoeffer, 4:77.

69. Bonhoeffer, 4:75.

While claiming that "it is not an ideal man that [God] loves, but man as he is; not an ideal world, but the real world,"[70] Bonhoeffer also admonishes us to forego our sense of self if we are to truly follow Jesus Christ. He argues that listening to one's own moral compass and acting on the subsequent perceptions results in "false hearing" and "false doing": "We cannot ourselves examine whether our hearing and our doing are true or false."[71] Indeed, all judgment that is based on one's own knowledge of good or bad is presented by Bonhoeffer as nothing more than the attempt for one to justify themselves before God:

> If my intent in passing judgement were really to destroy evil, then I would seek evil where is really threatens me, namely in myself. But the fact that I seek evil in another person reveals that in such judgements I am really seeking to be right myself, that I want to avoid punishment for my own evil by judging another person. All judging presupposes the most dangerous self-deception, namely, that the word of God applies differently to me than it does to my neighbor.[72]

Bonhoeffer's main claim here is that a true Christian ethic is one based solely one's implicit and unfailing faith in God. Through implicit faith in God one comes to apprehend God's will only in its doing. Overall Bonhoeffer grounds Christian ethics in a world whose terms of existence were shaped, and continue to be shaped, by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, our existence, infused as it is with Christ's mission, is to recognize the ways in which this reality "is taking effect as something now present, and towards the way in which life may be conducted in this reality. Its purpose is, therefore, participation in the reality of God and of the world in Jesus Christ today."[73]

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70. Bonhoeffer, 4:73.

71. Bonhoeffer, 4:50.

72. Bonhoeffer, 4:172.

73. Bonhoeffer, 4:193.

Bonhoeffer's admonition that the self is the most dangerous site for potential evil and his assertion that human reality is essentially participation in the incarnate body of Christ seem incongruent with each other, especially when his directives from *Discipleship* are also taken into consideration. In *Discipleship* he cautions Christians not to waste any time or energy on the corrupt and dying world of humanity, but instead to focus on God's promised salvation which awaits Jesus' disciples after earthly life. This seemingly presents Jesus Christ more as an eschatological actuality, rather than a here-and-now reality, as Christ is portrayed in *Ethics*. Examining these contrasts helps to identify the nature of the shift that did take place in Bonhoeffer's theology from the time that he published *Discipleship* to the time that he developed writing for *Ethics* (i.e. shows the fruits of a successful wrestling). Dialogue with Barth's theology of redemption is useful to explain the transition.

Christopher Morse, professor of systematic theology at Union Theological Seminary defined predestination, that is, the election of God, according to Barth's theology as "God's choice to have a world and to love it into freedom."[74] Although he never makes explicit reference to what Barth termed "God's grace choice," Bonhoeffer uses this theory as the foundation for understanding the essential condition of the human in modernity, which is a state of disunion with God displayed by the human desire to be the "origin of the election." It must be remembered, however, that in Barth's concept, election is God's own grace choice to have a world and love it into freedom.[75] Therefore, disunion with God disconnects one from

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74. To be clear on this point, according to Dr. Christopher Morse of Union Theology Seminary, Barth's concept of predestination—also called God's election and God's grace choice (predestination = God's election = God's grace choice)—was to have a world and love it into freedom. I am arguing here that although Bonhoeffer does not explicitly refer to this definition of election, his thought reveals evidence of its influence.

75. Bonhoeffer, 4:23.

true knowledge of good from evil. However, humans assert their own knowledge of good and evil by judging others, even by judging themselves. Therefore, Bonhoeffer situates authentic commitment to the will of God in one's unconditional surrender to faith in God. Bonhoeffer tells us that this faithful surrender is complete only when one forgoes all individual knowledge of good and evil for a life of doing God's will in ways unbeknownst to oneself. This is interesting given the fact that Bonhoeffer repeatedly emphasizes the importance of recognizing the *concreteness* of the ethical task, which he identifies as inseparably linked with particular persons, times, and places. He discards even the possibility of a timeless universal ethic based on the essential finite character of human existence.

Bonhoeffer also proposes that ethical discourse is not the dominant discourse of life. Since life is *not* an ongoing battle of good against evil in which humans are caught in the middle, there are times where ethical decision-making is necessary but it is not the dominant mode of existence for humans. Essentially, Bonhoeffer is attempting to limit ethical phenomena to their proper place and time, in order to optimize the potential for ethical decision-making. Especially controversial about such an ethical model is Bonhoeffer's assertion of the necessity of maintaining a divinely authorized relationship between the superior and inferior. He contends that the authority for legitimizing ethical propositions goes with a specific "office," not with a specific person. This situates ethical problem solving within particular roles in society (i.e. father, Church leaders, etc.) that various humans hold at any given time rather than within specific characteristics, skills, or worldviews. One's objective position in the world decides who is authorized to speak the ethical, not an individual's subjective achievements.

For Bonhoeffer, the only possible object of a Christian ethic is the commandment of God: "God's commandment is the only warrant for ethical discourse."[76] Bonhoeffer has a very definitive, albeit not necessarily clear (perhaps, even purposefully unclear), conception of what characterizes God's commandment. Similar to ethical dilemmas, God's commandment always involves concrete direction and is precise in its content. The content of God's commandment is not up for debate or interpretation. Harkening back to the assertions he made in *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer identifies the proper response to God's commandment as simply either obedience or disobedience. This characterization of God's commandment is reminiscent of the contemporary Catholic understanding of the results expected from a fruitful personal discernment process, through which one seeks and confirms God's will specific to their life. A fruitful discernment is one that results in a sense of certainty and joy. Bonhoeffer affirms that "God's commandment … embraces the whole of life."[77]

Although he identifies liberty as "that which lies beyond the range of what can be commanded,"[78] Bonhoeffer asserts that the ultimate object of God's commandment is liberty. When using the term "liberty" here, Bonhoeffer does not mean personal freedom the way that one may define it in contemporary America today. For Bonhoeffer, personal liberty is perfectly congruent with God's commandment, and to revisit the language of chapter 2, it is perfect conformation with Christ. Conformation with Christ, which includes being part of a community, the Church, is formed in participation with Christ. Community was, in fact, essential to Bonhoeffer, as he explains in detail in his publication *Living Together*, which

76. Bonhoeffer, 4:272.

77. Bonhoeffer, 4:275.

78. Bonhoeffer, 4:277.

is about how he established a pastoral and prophetic community among seminarians at Finklewalde.

To avoid perpetuating any caricatures of Bonhoeffer or misappropriating his ideas, I stay very close to the original language Bonhoeffer used, as there is a real danger that ascribing specifics to how one conforms to Christ and what that looks like concretely will betray the ambiguity that is intentionally inherent in Bonhoeffer's theological ethics. Bonhoeffer teaches that God's commandment "is at the same time the centre and fullness of life. It is not only obligation but also permission. It does not only forbid but it also sets free for life." The commandment of God guides life even if the person is not conscious that it is doing so: "it comes upon the [person], accompanies him and guides him, in all the countless situations." God's commandment brings "an inner freedom and certainty of life and action." "The commandment of God is the permission to live as man before God." It commands freedom and "embraces the whole of life."[79]

Bonhoeffer's description of God's commandment here may be neither familiar nor easy to comprehend. However, when placed in dialogue with twentieth-century Catholic theology, especially liberation theologies, it becomes clear that Bonhoeffer's ideas lent sustenance to the development of concepts that are foundational to contemporary liberation and contextual theologies, especially the fundamental teaching that freedom *from* oppressive structures is freedom *for* God.[80] For these theologies, liberation is not only political and social

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79. Bonhoeffer, 4:275.

80. For a good overview of liberation theology in the Catholic tradition, see Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, eds., Taking Down Our Harps: Black Catholics in the United States (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998). For an informative introduction to liberative Latinx theologies, see Orlando O. Espín and Miguel H. Diaz, eds., From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999). Elizabeth Johnson also provides a helpful

equality, it is also personal self-determination, a self-determination that has serving God's will at its heart. Chapter 4 will focus more on the development of a theology that emphasizes the importance of self-determination that serves God when I present my constructive theology of God's love, which says "I free you."

The influence of Karl Barth's theology on the development of Bonhoeffer's thinking, although identifiable throughout the books we have read by Bonhoeffer, becomes more obvious in his *Letter and Papers* where Bonhoeffer places Christianity as a religion in conversation with the modern "world come of age."[81] Although Bonhoeffer's critique of religion is predicated on important aspects of Barth's thinking, it also diverges significantly from Barth's central argument that all religion is false. Barth contends that religion is false based on its nature as a "created" construct.[82] As he explains in the second part of the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth's critique includes not only *all* existing religions, but also *any* potential form of religion. For Barth, religion is *necessarily* false because by its very nature as a construct within God's creation it is essentially that which is *other* than God. Religion, like the human person, is infinitely qualitatively distinct from God and therefore is essentially incongruent with the true nature of God.[83] Although predicated on Barth's

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overview of contemporary Catholic theologies and their liberative strands in her book *Quest for the Living God*: *Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

81. "World come of age" is a phrase Bonhoeffer introduces in a letter to Eberhard Bethge (Tegel, June 8, 1944, in Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8, 424–431. John W. de Gruchy explains that Bonhoeffer borrowed this phrase from Wilhelm Dilthey, a German philosopher "who helped form the modern study of hermeneutics and the philosophy of history" (DBWE 8:23, 680). De Gruchy quotes Dilthey to explain that this phrase refers to the "movement toward human autonomy that began around the thirteenth century" (8:23).

82. Barth, *CD*, I/1.

83. Barth, *CD*, I/2.

theology, Bonhoeffer's critique of religion is nuanced by his suggestion that the falseness of Christianity is not to be attributed to its intrinsic nature, but rather to the form it has currently taken in the world—a point that utilizes his entire oeuvre toward a critique of existing ideological-political structures.

In his later letters to Eberhard Bethge (c. 1944), Bonhoeffer transitions from a Balthasarian concept of the Christian church as Christ's proper "form" in the world to a recognition that as a human construction, the church *in its current expression* is essentially flawed. Bonhoeffer traces this "malformation" of the church back at least as far as medieval times, when the central principle of the church (as identified by Bonhoeffer) was heteronomy to clerics (versus heteronomy to divine will).[84] Bonhoeffer also explicitly mentions that it was a "mistake" for the church to primarily emphasize an other-worldly redemption (over against a this-worldly redemption).[85] In making these critiques, Bonhoeffer shifts the focus away from the inherent sovereignty of God as the root of religious "falsehood" (as in Barth's work) to human agency. This is a significant shift too in that it implicates theologians *as* writers who attempt to make use of particular positions in order to justify their political positions. Bonhoeffer completes the divergence from the Barthian concept of God's sovereignty by asserting that it is through weakness and powerlessness in the created world—ultimately through an embrace of the fragmentation that so many fear—that God brings about redemption.[86]

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84. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8:360. Bonhoeffer's roots in Lutheranism are clear here.

85. Bonhoeffer, 8:336.

86. Bonhoeffer makes this transition throughout his writings in *Ethics*. See, for example, "God's Love and the Disintegration of the World," in *Ethics*, DBWE 6:299–338.

Bonhoeffer argues that the primary characteristic of religion in the modern era is not that it is false, but rather that it is unnecessary.[87] According to Bonhoeffer, new discoveries in science and other fields, along with advancements in technology allow humans in the modern era to better understand their existence and other worldly phenomenon in a way that displaces explanations previously provided by religion (explanations that seem insufficient in light of modern discoveries). Rather than dialoguing with these new understandings of the world, the church chose instead to "dig in its heels," refusing to abdicate its self-appointed power. However, Bonhoeffer asserts that the proper Christian response in a world that has outgrown God is not one of power and judgment (as displayed by the church), but one of weakness and suffering (as displayed in Christ's cross).[88] This emphasis adds yet another layer to the theology of fragmentation that Bonhoeffer's legacy points toward as a form of resistance against those political ideologies masquerading as theological statements.

It is specifically by virtue of God's powerlessness and suffering that God calls us to live in this world. Unlike the human church, God accepts a world where God is not sovereign, where God is not even needed, and chooses to relate to the modern human in a different way. In this way, God shows us that the true path to liberation in modernity is not through sovereign (political) power, but through weakness, powerlessness, and suffering. According to Bonhoeffer, it is precisely through weakness and suffering that God approaches the modern believer, and therefore, it is also through weakness and suffering the one must

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87. Which he refers to as "religionless Christianity" (Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8:20, 362–264).

88. Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross is prominent in *Discipleship*, *Ethics*, and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. See for example chapter 6: The Sermon on the Mount in Discipleship, "History and Good" in *Ethics*, and his letter to Bethge, 8 July 1944.

submit to God's call of discipleship, which in our world will always lead to death on the cross. Fortunately, Bonhoeffer assures us that "in this sense death is the crowning of human freedom."[89]

These central aspects of Bonhoeffer's theology—his theology of the cross, his concept of conformation to Christ, and his approach to ethics that embraces contextual ambiguity—are complemented by Taylor's definition of the theological. According to Taylor, the theological is necessarily interlinked with "agonistic[90] political thought and practice" and "is born of the struggle of those bearing, resisting, and finding life under 'the weight of the world,' particularly that weight as shifted, or concentrated, in structures of imposed social suffering."[91]

The theological is different, and not to be confused with Theology, which is to be understood as a credentialed profession in the academy.[92] In fact, according to Taylor, the

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89. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, *DBWE 8*:375. Note that Hitler developed his theology based on a strikingly similar critique to Bonhoeffer's of the Church's inability to negotiate the scientific and technological advancements of the modern world (as discussed in earlier in the chapter). However, Hitler's theology presents a stark contrast to a theology of the cross that emphasizes weakness and suffering.

90. That is, associated with agony and (etymologically) struggle. Referencing Andrew Schaap, ed., *Law and Agonistic Politics* (London: Ashgate, 2009), Taylor explains, "notions of 'agony' and 'agonistic' derive from the concept of *agōn*, meaning struggle, and for political theory have been reworked by nineteenth century German and, increasingly, U.S. political thought" (*Theological and the Political*, xii). He further describes "agonism" and "agonistic politics" as "terms used … for struggle that entails human pain and suffering (agony), and includes, though cannot be reduced to, the antagonisms and contradictions in social being that often generate such struggle and agony" (xii).

91. Taylor, *Theological and the Political*, xii.

92. Taylor renders Theology with a capital T to label it as a "guild disciple, a credentialed profession in especially the Christian West that typically reflects on doctrine of religious tradition and fosters an ethos of transcendence." p. xi However, as Taylor points out, "[u]nlike the dominant ethos of Theology, the major concern of the theological is not transcendence, and its primary language is not doctrine…The theological is a discourse tht is disciplined, not so much by doctrinal formulation, but by reflection taking place at multiple sites of the academics and other public thinking." p. xii

theological is disruptive to Theology.[93] Whereas Theology is conventional, systematic, "doctrinally structured ethos of transcendence," the theological "strikes a neither/nor approach to the binary of transcendence/immanence, but recasts both of these in a milieu of what Jean-Luc Nancy terms 'transimmanence.'"[94]

According to Taylor, the transimmanent is a "haunting and ghostly realm of seething presences…within which we must reckon with a new belonging of the theological and the political to one another."[95] Taylor argues that the theological is necessarily agonistic, as in agonizing or agony. Referring to the root word *agōn*, meaning struggle, Taylor points out that the theological is this transimmanent dimension to agonistic political thought and practice which finds it's most effective expression in the "weight of the world," or in the places where social suffering and struggle is imposed.[96]

Taylor himself references Bonhoeffer without citing him when he describes the current setting of theology as a "post-theological world" in a "world come of age."[97] Further reminiscent of Bonhoeffer's thoughts on religionless Christianity, Taylor points out that his understanding of the theological is something that "haunts the discourse of guild Theology as usually practiced. It unsettles and haunts not only by the presence of oft-excluded persons in Theology, but also by posing a challenge to largely decontextualized reflection in Theology."[98]

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93. Taylor, xi.

94. Taylor, xi.

95. Taylor, xi-xii.

96. Taylor, xii

97. Taylor, 2.

98. Taylor, 62.

Like Bonhoeffer, Taylor understands that "contexts have powers of determination"[99] and he argues that Theology has misunderstood context, reducing it to a concept in the realms of society and body.[100] What Taylor is pointing to here is the reality that contexts have the power to shape the way one thinks and experiences the world. As Bonhoeffer points out, one's context is also the locust of connection with the radically incarnational Christian God and where we learn how to conform to Christ.

Taylor connects this reduction in the value of context to Ernesto Lucan's notion of "failed transcendence," stating: "even those who reject it must work in the ruins of its failure."[101]Referring to the "ruins of the transcendent," Taylor proposes an alternate way of understanding the power and place of the theological. He adopts the term "transimmanence" from Nancy[102] as the proper domain of the theological and as a term that acknowledges that the theological and the political (the transcendent and the immanent) participate in an inherent belonging together. "The notion of transimmanence will emerge more dialectically in relation to transcendence, acknowledging that we must work in the ruins of transcendence, that we must not simply oppose transcendence but reconstitute ourselves amid its

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99. Taylor, 54. Summarizing Theodore R. Schatzki, Taylor further explains that contexts "are the networks of our living, shaping our flesh, our affect, and our thinking" (54). See Theodore R. Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

100. Taylor, 56.

101. Taylor, 11.

102. Later in the text, Taylor describes transimmanence as "a practice or reflection that steps into and moves within the political. It is the liberating opening and closing, and continual opening and reopening, of existence to itself, to and through its many singularities and pluralities. Transimmanence is existence thus refusing to be locked in place, 'locked down' in systems that resist continual opening and reopening" (15). Taylor goes on to explain that it is this transimmanence that gives power and presence to oppressed people "to show that they have not been erased" (16).

'failure.'"[103] According to Taylor, an important task of the theological is to manifest these failures in a constructive way. This resonates with my attempts to describe and construct a theology of fragmentation; that is, a theology that reconstitutes the transcendent immanent within the world, within human beings, and within theology, despite our failures.

Taylor asserts that the theological "traces and theorizes the ways that persons and groups rendered subordinate and vulnerable by agonistic politics and its systemic imposed social suffering nevertheless haunt, unsettle, and perhaps dissolve the structures of those systems."[104] If Taylor is correct, perhaps this contributed to the crumbling of the great systems of guild Theology in the early twentieth century in the face of worldwide atrocities such as the world wars.

Taylor's concept of the transimmanent theological resonates with an approach that meets Admirand's criteria for a valid theodicy. Admirand argues a theodicy that can withstand encounter with mass atrocities[105] must be able to acknowledge and incorporate its theoretical limitations, which Admirand describes as "fissures, gaps, and caesuras."[106] This is exactly what Taylor's transimmanent theological provides for guild Theology as it disrupts

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103. Taylor, 24, referencing Laclau.

104. Taylor, 9.

105. Such as the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide, and the civil war in Darfur, among others.

106. Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity*, xxii. In his foreword to Admirand's book, Burrell considers the overall validity of any theodicy done in the face of mass atrocity, "Indeed, what could be more pretentious than attempting to 'justify the ways of God to us,' as theodicy has classically been described? Yet what saves this attempt is the way [Admirand] presses to have something to say—however broken or inarticulate" (p. x). This dissertation aims for similar achievement—constructing a broken theology of fragmentation and ambiguity that recognizes a loss for words as not only a theologically valid stance, but also a holy one. In this sense, the current project builds on Admirand's focus, extending the challenge to find something meaningful to say amidst global suffering to all theologians, not just theodicists.

systematic norms of the more conventional ethos of transcendence. Furthermore, if, indeed, it is the transimmanent theological that disrupted systemic Christianity over the past century, toppling systemically oppressive and genocidal forces along with it, then fragmentation serves not only as a potentially powerful method for theology, but also for social and political change.

Using Jewish scholar Anson Laytner as a sounding board, Admirand places the discussion of fragmentation within the (marginal) Jewish tradition of arguing with God. Here Admirand asserts that an investigation into the tradition of arguing with—or questioning—God can help "flesh out" some of the "gaps, limits, or failures of theoretical" theological systems.[107] He credits Laytner with revealing "how a faith-practice of 'wrestling' with God has been sustained" throughout many devastating times in Jewish history, including not only the Holocaust, but also the destruction of the temple in 70 CE as well as biblical records of unjust suffering, such as in the Book of Job.[108] Admirand also dialogues with Jewish theologian Zachary Braiterman, who highlights, among other things, the special character of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jews, and how this relationship relies on a certain wrestling, questioning, or "calling to task" of God. With Braiterman, Admirand proposes that a tradition which values arguing with God has the "potential of "reorienting significance of the supplement, the trace, and the fragment"[109] within a tradition that carries the possibility of "ultimately crippling contemporary religious discourses by forcing

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107. Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity*, 169.

108. Admirand, 169–170.

109. Admirand, 186.

philosophers and theologians to defend the indefensible."[110] In this way, his theological reflections parallel the course that Bonhoeffer was aiming for toward the end of his own life as he embraced the fragmentary as the small voice of the theological moving through this world in opposition to the dominant, political guild Theology, to borrow Taylor's phrasing.

Interestingly, Admirand also connects this tradition of arguing with God to a steadfast faith that can survive even the worst atrocities. For example, he presents Elie Wiesel, Auschwitz survivor, as an example of someone who witnesses to "a stubborn faith that clings to him in spite of himself, a shadow that is a part of him and cannot be sundered."[111] Or, perhaps, this stubborn faith is another manifestation of Taylor's theological transimmanent specter haunting post-Holocaust Theology.

## Conclusion

Admirand explains that even if personal testimonies, such witness to "ruptures in history," are indeed manifestations of God's presence in the world, "we are often left with fractured justice, fractured innocence, and fractured language." Although Admirand is reflecting here specifically on the murkiness of responsibility and guilt when humans perpetrate unthinkable horrors onto other humans, his point has more pervasive ramifications. As Bonhoeffer's own efforts to "conform" to Christ led him from pastor to underground conspirator can attest, moments of such rupture in historical norms often leave society with "contradiction and concealment, a distortion that plays havoc with one's … sense of self."[112] As such, Bonhoeffer's work reflects the "faith crisis" and "hermeneutical rupture" that precipitated from,

110. Admirand, 185.

111. Admirand, 211.

112. Admirand, 228.

in Admirand's words, the distorted and fractured representations of God in the twentieth century.[113]

Indeed, Bonhoeffer saw long before others how distorted and fractured his life and his culture had become. Rather than simply reject such fractures, however, he sought to develop a sense of the fragmentary that crafted a new sense of meaning from out of the ashes of an ongoing cultural destruction. Recall here Bonhoeffer's desire to find meaning within these circumstances:

> We cannot hate [death] as we used to…. Fundamentally we feel that we really belong to death already, and that every new day is a miracle. It would probably not be true to say that we welcome death … we are too inquisitive for that—or, to put it more seriously, we should like to see something more of the meaning of our life's broken fragments.[114]

The next chapter will examine Bonhoeffer's lectures on Genesis 1–3, which can themselves be considered one of his attempts at finding meaning and direction in the context of Nazi Germany.

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113. Admirand, 228.

114. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* [1972], 16.

# CHAPTER 4

# A LOVE THAT SAYS "I FREE YOU":

# AMBIGUITY AS CONTEXT AND *ANALOGIA RELATIONIS* AS *IMAGO DEI*

## Chapter Organization

The last two chapters laid the foundations for understanding the theological landscape that contributed to the development of Bonhoeffer's theological ethics and its connection to strands of thought in contemporary theological conversations. Similarly, this chapter will begin by providing a selective overview of the emergence of ambiguity and historicity in sociological and anthropological conversations across the twentieth century in order to ground a discussion of Bonhoeffer's concept of *analogia relationis (analogy of relation, which, for Bonhoeffer, is is essentially human nature)*.

In his lectures on creation and fall, Bonhoeffer presents a concept of analogia relationis where he points out that humans are essentially relational creations. According to Bonhoeffer, this relationality reflects the inherently relational (i.e. trinitarian) nature of God. Analogia relationis or analogy of relation is how Bonhoeffer talks about this connection between God and humanity, which can also be understood as the *imago dei*. In these lectures, Bonhoeffer points out that human existence has been fragmented throughout all time (and in conjunction with our inability to know good from evil), making the analogy of relation the necessary foundation for a life lived in conformation to Christ.

To set the stage for this conversation, this chapter begins with a discussion of the human condition in a postmodern setting. It is important to keep in mind that I am bridging a gap between the time that Bonhoeffer wrote the lectures being examined in this chapter (early twentieth century) versus the application I am making to the postmodern setting (early twenty-first century). Like some of the other chapters, this chapter will also quote Bonhoeffer extensively at certain points. This is purposely done to give the reader a sense of Bonhoeffer's own rhetoric and to avoid any possible misappropriations of his work.

Set within the framework of postmodernity, this chapter begins by briefly engaging Jean-François Lyotard and Gregory Baum on philosophical and sociological perspectives in postmodern theory. These thinkers are followed by a brief discussion of pertinent aspects of the philosophy of Karl Marx, as well as Peter Berger's sociological framework. This will set up an anthropological discussion of the postmodern, guided by Susan Ross, Sallie McFague, and Iain Wilkinson, who deals specifically with the concept of suffering in the postmodern context.

As is obvious from the previous paragraph, which names multiple scholars from various fields, I use an interdisciplinary approach in this chapter to generate a functional understanding of ambiguity and its influence on both society and the human individual. Each thinker I selected was connected to my primary interest in explaining the contemporary human condition as one that is fragmented and often marred by suffering, but it is also filled promises from the Christian God of freedom, healing and hope.

With this paradigm in mind, I sought thinkers who could help me to truly and clearly represent the multifaceted reality of both the human person and our existence in society. As many of the thinkers before the twenty-first century were necessarily limited to white men

due to the limited access to education and publication to others before then, I also sought where possible, to include more diverse voices in this chapter.

In addition to these general criteria, my overall sociological thinking has been greatly influenced by the theology faculty at Loyola University Chicago, including Susan Ross—whose anthropology I refer to in this chapter—and Michael Schuck who introduced me to sociology of religion thinkers Gregory Baum, Peter Berger, and Iain Wilkinson. Schuck also impressed upon me the integral role that Enlightenment thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and Max Weber played in the development of contemporary theological thinking. It was also in working on environmental sustainability project with Schuck that I first encountered the powerful theology of Sallie McFague that I refer to in this chapter as well.

Not being an extensive scholar of philosophy, I followed my dissertation director's advice on seeking knowledge of the origins of the postmodern in the work of Jean-François Lyotard. As one of the first philosophers to describe what has come to be called "postmodern," I rely on Lyotard to provide a foundational philosophical understanding of the emergence of the phenomenon, although my engagement with him is limited solely to this.

Like many other sections of this dissertation, this chapter was written as a dialogue among these many scholars. Although my engagement with each here is brief, representing mere fragments of their work, I do not take their concepts lightly or cursorily.[1] Rather, my

1. My study of these authors is not limited to the very brief fragments of work that I select to represent them in this chapter. Indeed, I have written many other whole papers on each of these thinkers and worked through their theologies with the leading theological thinkers at my disposal as a student at Union Theological Seminary and Loyola University Chicago. Part of this study has been the crucial task of engaging with each thinker's context, their autobiographical backgrounds, and their critics in order to ground my own understanding of their thoughts. None of this work is reflected in this chapter, however, as the scope of my project limits the amount of engagement I have with each thinker here.

intention is to carry the full meaning of their concepts and place them into conversation with each other thereby creating new, creating *more* meaning.

The final section of this chapter engages more extensively with one author: M. Shawn Copeland, whose work I have valued since my time at Union Theology Seminary. I chose Copeland because she is a black Catholic woman and because her thinking represents a contemporary theology of *analogia relationis*. In dialogue with Copeland, in this final section I will also present the most constructive aspects of this dissertation where I argue that God's is a love that says "I free you."

As the final chapter in the dissertation, this chapter also revisits the major themes that have already been discussed throughout the previous chapters. These include, the validity of constructing new methods of theology out of fragments, not only fragmented contents but also fragmented methods (using fragmented materials and putting them together in fragmented ways); emphasizing a narrative writing style that highlights the central role of narrative in divine revelation; embrace of contextual ambiguity in theological ethics; and a radically incarnational Christology that holds it all together. As the previous chapters have explained, all of these concepts and methods (like the dissertation itself) are modelled on the life and the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, itself fragmented and shaped by the contextual ambiguity of the rise of the Third Reich and the horrors of the Holocaust. Many points about Bonhoeffer's legacy will be reiterated throughout this chapter in order to make connections clear between the relevance of Bonhoeffer's life and legacy and a theology of fragmentation for the current U.S. Catholic context.

## Opening Observations

As this chapter will explain, a love that says "I free you" initially captured in an *analogia*

*relationis* and continuously communicated in and through the world by virtue of the incarnation of Jesus Christ is what the U.S. Catholic community has to gain from Bonhoeffer when a fuller understanding of his work, his life, and his legacy are taken into consideration. This chapter will also explain that trying to live in conformation to Christ is the proper response of the human person to God's offer of a love that says "I free you." For contemporary Catholic theologian M. Shawn Copeland, the concept and content of "solidarity" parallels Bonhoeffer's concept of conformation to Christ.

Section A of this chapter dissects a history of postmodern ideas and applies them in a rereading of the creation narratives in Genesis 1–3. Bonhoeffer's own exposition of Genesis 1–3 is considered in relation to these concepts.

The concepts that are explained in section A of this chapter[2] all rely heavily on the inherent human characteristic of relationality. Humans, cultures, and societies are dependent on relationships to develop, grow, change, even decline. Therefore, section A expounds on how sociological and philosophical thinking since the Enlightenment wrestled with the significance of relationality in human history.

The discussions in section A point directly to an important underlying theme of this chapter, which is that relation is the true *imago dei*. Such an *imago dei*, an analogy of relationality that, like all relationships, leaves room for development, even ambiguity, offers

2. Summarily, these concepts are Lyotard's insights that narrative is a fundamental aspect of culture and is influential to culture's dynamism; Marx's emphasis on the malleability of the human person; and Berger's description of the process of socialization. See Section A of this chapter for details on each of these topics.

a viable alternative to the more traditional and historical Christian theology of *analogia entis that dominated the field of theology at the time of Bonhoeffer*.[3]

The emphasis of the sovereignty of God, and thereby the ultimate power of human persons within creation, is one of the central Christian theological aspects fragmented not only by twentieth-century political atrocities, but also the twenty-first-century climate crisis. This is a reality already captured in the works of many contemporary contextual, ecological, and liberation theologians.

This argument emerges more clearly in section B of this chapter, where I consider two incongruous traditional Christian interpretations of the creation narratives; (1) human nature is inherently "fallen" and "sinful"[4] and (2) human nature is the *imago dei*.[5] These two

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3. Each being the author of a chapter on the Trinity in the same Roman Catholic systematic theology textbook, both David Tracy (see pp. 119–127) and Anthony J. Godzieba (see pp. 179–192) point out that the more traditional metaphysical analogy of being which privileged a sovereign God has been challenged and rethought in the modern period. They point to contemporary models of the analogy of being that are based in concepts of the Trinity that stress relationality, as it this dissertation. However, it is important to keep in mind, as both authors point out, that these patterns of thought did not emerge until the late twentieth century. Therefore, for Bonhoeffer to be writing about an analogy of relationality versus the traditional metaphysical analogy of being was quite radical in his time. See David Tracy, "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," chapter 3.1 in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, edited by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011) and Anthony J. Godzieba, "The Trinitarian Mystery of God: A 'Theological Theology,'" chapter 3.2 in idem.

4. By "fallen" I am referring to the dominant Christian interpretation of the creation myth related in Genesis 1–3 which holds that humans fell from a state of perfect grace in the garden of Eden when they disobeyed God and ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Fallen, therefore, refers to what is also commonly referred to in Christian tradition as "original sin," sin with which every human is born. "Sinful" is a reference to original sin, but it is also a wider reference to other categories of sin commonly discussed in Christian theology, such as personal sin (venial and mortal sin) and social or structural sin. For more information and a detailed discussion of sin, see the Sin in Christian Thought entry in the Sanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

5. Although the word "nature" can have many meanings, when I use the phrase "human nature" in this dissertation, I am referring to that which makes humans distinct from other animals and created beings. When talking about the nature of humanity, I am also referring to that which all

historical teaching traditions suggest that human nature is either definitely bad (in the case of fallen or sinful) or good (in the case of *imago dei*). However, such dichotomous teachings are called into question by more modern and postmodern ideas that suggest that human nature is itself variable[6] (that is, neither definitively good nor bad) and that the condition for the possibility of sin is variability in human nature.[7] The concepts of malleability, relationality, and variability will be read closely alongside the creation narratives, examining specifically the moment and conditions of creation and expulsion.

These are questions and concepts that theology as a field wrestled with at the turn of the twentieth century (whether via liberalism, neo-scholasticism or neo-orthodox theology).

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humans have in common, an innate quality or characteristic that is inextricably constitutive of every human person.

6. The term "variable" is not taken from another thinker. It is a term I have selected as an alternative to the false dichotomy that is often applied to thinking about human nature as being either inherently good or inherently bad. I came to use this term based on an anthropologically and sociologically informed reading of the creation narratives using Bonhoeffer's *analogia relationis* as the primary hermeneutical lens. Additionally, when I say that human nature is variable, I do not mean to contradict other instances where I may state that human nature is essentially relational. I am not equating variability with relationality (or either of these things with fragmentation). I argue that the very nature of the human person is relationality. This relationality is the image of God (*imago dei*) in us (it is how we reflect God), and it is this relationality that allows us not only to imagine God, but also to connect with God (*analogia relationis*). However, I use the phrase "human nature is variable" to open up space for ambiguity. While saying that human nature is variable may not be theologically precise, theological precision is not my aim. My aim is to redirect the attention of the reader and the theological thinker. I do not seek to dictate answers in this chapter or in this dissertation. I use language and a writing style that aims to find places in Christian theological tradition to invite ambiguity in the hope that it will yield new ways of thinking.

7. While I think it is reasonable to posture that the tension between fallen and *imago dei* captures at some level the variability in human nature, as already named by some more contemporary ways of understanding human nature, I don't think such an explanation really allows us to grasp the true *imago dei* which is inseparable from the fundamental human nature of relationality in conjunction with the inherent human capacity for growth and change (which it shares with all creation). I also am more interested in opening a conversation than I am in finding specific answers to questions, which is what makes the probing in this direction valuable. I do not necessarily seek to reconcile the tension between fallen and *imago dei* as much as I seek to instigate different ways of thinking about these concepts.

Bonhoeffer in particular took up the challenge by creating lectures based on a theological exposition of the creation stories. In this chapter, I will use the theological concepts presented in Bonhoeffer's lectures on creation and fall, particularly his theory of analogia relationis, as a hermeneutical lens to dissect the creation myths. Bonhoeffer's works provide a sound hermeneutical tool as he himself was grappling with the challenge of reconciling the seeming contradictions presented in traditional Christian anthropological and cosmological teachings versus modern theological scholarship and in light of historical events and the context when he wrote them.

It is important to remember that these lectures were written and given early in Bonhoeffer's career, before he experienced the full disintegration of German Christian culture under the Third Reich and before his theology would shift to a theology of fragmentation. Although Bonhoeffer wrote these lectures early in his career, Bonhoeffer's interpretations and the theme of analogia relationis[8] are ones that can be seen throughout his future works and, therefore, can be considered valid pieces of his legacy. Bonhoeffer will write of the fragmentation of the human person in these lectures, but he has not yet developed a theology of fragmentation so we will still see him trying to reconcile theological concepts at this time.

## Section A: Postmodernity

### History of Postmodern Ideas

There are certain patterns and trends that characterize all historical periods. For contemporary life, these patterns and trends have been grouped together under the term

8. For example, Bonhoeffer's concept of conformation to Christ and his radically incarnational Christology are grounded in his understanding of *analogia relationis* and the fundamental relationality of the nature of God and the nature of humans.

"postmodernism." Postmodern theory emerged under the influence of philosopher Jean-François Lyotard,[9] who

> argued that contemporary science has changed the way in which knowledge must itself be conceived. Contemporary scientific knowledge can no longer be thought as proceeding towards a single goal, nor can it be unified in a single great system of knowledge … far from seeking to augment existing knowledge, contemporary science seeks to articulate claims that destabilize existing models of explanation, promulgating new norms for understanding and establishing new axioms. Rather than proceeding consensually, science progresses through disagreement and dissent, fragmenting fields of knowledge rather than unifying them.[10]

The final sentence of this quote highlights Lyotard's essential observation, and central to this dissertation, that knowledge and "progress" have in many ways disintegrated and fragmented. What Lyotard hints at but this dissertation makes explicit is the idea that fields of study should embrace this development rather than lament it.

Lyotard's concepts of postmodern theory were greatly influenced by his understanding of the centrality of narrative. This can be seen by the emphasis placed on narrative in *The Postmodern Condition*, where he presents narrative as a fundamental aspect of culture which impacts a society's stability or dynamism.[11] Following in Lyotard's footsteps, postmodern critique questions grand narratives (including religions), resists the absolutizing of any ideas, and denies universalisms. It rests easier with the fragmentary—what I link in this chapter to

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9. Postmodern theory emerged in Lyotard's 1979 publication *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (Translated from French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979). In the Foreword to the English translation of this text by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), Fredric Jameson defines postmodernism as "incredulity to metanarratives" (xi).

10. Keith Chrome and James Williams, eds., *The Lyotard Reader and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 10. This quote is particularly nascent because one of the major claims of this dissertation as a constructive theology of fragmentation is that unification of knowledge can emerge out of fragments.

11. Chrome and Williams, 118.

an analogy of relation—versus more traditional, metaphysical claims established through an analogy of being that came before it.[12]

Compared to previous periods of history where Western society operated as a cohesive hegemonic unit, modern and postmodern culture are marked by their tendency to compartmentalize reality. Whereas Christianity, a fundamental building block of Western civilization, was pervasive in past cultures, now it is simply one piece of culture, among many others (such as politics, economics, education, etc.).[13]

However, postmodernism is a concept that is resistant to clear definition. This is partly due to the fact that various academic fields of study do not completely agree on the concept or characteristics of postmodernity or its relationship to its (obvious) predecessor, modernism. However, this historical development also reflects an ambivalence to definitive language that many humanities and social sciences fields have adopted in the twenty-first century, a reluctance that is not necessarily unwarranted in the wake of the West's great fall from grace less than a century ago. In fact, one of the major challenges that proved fatal to neo-orthodoxy was the emergence of an ambivalence that emerged in the mid-twentieth century toward religion and systems of any kind.[14] What theologians considered to be the

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12. My aim here is not to impose a dichotomy between an analogy of being and an analogy of relation, which would be theologically imprecise. Neither was this Bonhoeffer's aim. Rather, my aim is to instigate ambiguity and to emphasize an alternate perspective. My hope is that new ways of being can emerge from the ambiguity. This was the aim of Bonhoeffer as well, who right up until the end of his life was envisioning what rebuilding Germany would look like after the war.

13. For an overview of the socio-religious aspects of postmodernism, see Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology*, with a forward by Scott Kline and David Seljak, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007).

14. Given such legacies, as outlined in chapter 3, it is not surprising that the twentieth century precipitated a wholesale cultural shift toward resisting absolutized ideas, questioning grand narratives (including religions), and denying universalisms.

mass secularization of society can also be understood sociologically as the fragmentation of Western civilization,[15] a cultural shift that reflects society's desire to separate itself from the destructive consequences and disintegration of religious systems in a post-World War II, post-Holocaust world.

In *Religion and Alienation*, sociologist Gregory Baum attempts to "emphasize the ambivalence of religion, its light as well as dark side."[16] Baum criticizes a sociology that understands alienation as an essential part of the human condition[17] and situates blame for such an understanding partly on "the Church's excessive privatization of sin."[18]

Another important aspect of postmodernity with antecedents in developments of the modern era is a tendency toward relativity. In her book, *Anthropology*, Susan Ross states this simply as the reality that "we are all defined in ways that point to our own histories."[19] The importance of historical consciousness in postmodern scholarship cannot be overemphasized.

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15. Baum, *Religion and Alienation*.

16. Baum, 14.

17. In their foreword to *Religion and Alienation* (p. 8), Kline and Seljak quote Canadian sociologist Ray Morrow's explanation that Baum "sees the sociological imagination as giving us the ability to understand alienation as a product of injustice rather than an essential part of the human condition" ("Straining after Universality: Gregory Baum's Theological Method and Contemporary Social Criticism" (presentation, Annual Meeting of the Society for Socialist Studies, Learned Societies Conference, Queens University, Kingston, ON, June 1, 1991)).

18. Kline and Seljak, forward to *Religion and Alienation*. Kline and Seljak go on to explain that "the classical notion of sin as a freely chosen act by a conscious individual violating divine commands is insufficient when dealing with the evils that emerge from the unjust nature of social institutions and structures" (9). They explain that such "privatized faith is not politically innocent. It legitimates the individualism of the capitalist social order. In all of this, we risk losing the social dimension of the gospel. The good news that Christ came to feed the hungry and set the captives free" (11). These are very relevant themes for the discussion later in this chapter.

19. Susan A. Ross, *Anthropology: Seeking Light and Beauty*, Engaging Theology: Catholic Perspectives (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012), 70.

Ross explains: "the significance of social and historical relativity means precisely that: our ideas are *related* to our contexts."[20] Contemporary scholars must reckon with the reality that there is no development or idea in human history that is not contextually determined.

Karl Marx was one of the first scholars to identify the significance of context for human development, although he approached this topic from the perspective of commodification and its ramifications on modern society. Commodification has exercised so much influence over Western culture that today humans do not easily recognize the ways in which commodification dictates desires, one's sense of self, and a variety of social circumstances.[21] This reality combined with the vast depository of Marx's scholarship necessitates a brief description of his concepts as they relate to this chapter's understanding of human nature.

According to Marx, humans are distinctively defined by their ability to work and transform nature.[22] As an expression of their higher consciousness, human's productive skills and talents also give shape to the physical world. However, in practice, the commodification and division of human labor diminishes humanity's natural creativity, replacing it with the prescribed production of an object that has use-value in producing capital. In this process, laborers are alienated not only from the overall production process and the end product, but

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20. Ross, 71.

21. Dillon, *Introduction to Sociological Theory*, 42.

22. Dillon, 42. Dillon points out that in Marx's understanding, the basis of social structure is the production of necessities of life and the exchange of things produced. This organizational structure can take different forms. The commanding force behind the organization of modern Western civilization is capitalism, which relies on the commodification and division of human labor.

also from their own "species being"[23] and each other. This alienation prevents an individual's free growth and the development of personal skills and talents, instead forcing upon laborers a way of life that is contrary to human nature.

Marx contends that human consciousness is determined by the everyday material and social circumstances of life. Since capitalism dominates Western culture, it is subsumed into consciousness as a "normal" way of life. In identifying the way in which consciousness functions to immerse one unknowingly into the overarching ideological system of culture, Marx highlights the capacity of the *unconscious* mind. Marx identifies a kind of "false consciousness"[24] that subsumes the conscious mind in culturally constructed beliefs which have been internalized as self-identity.[25] The knowing mind of the individual is unaware that what presents itself as self-identity is actually an understanding of the self that has been imposed on it by external culture. In this way, people are unable to understand the mechanisms of social systems that work against them.

Marx identified *all* people as victims of the capitalist system that grew out of the pervasiveness of commodification. Therefore, as Dillon explains, wealthy capitalists are just as much slaves to the system as are poor laborers. The unconscious incorporation of cultural identity with self-identity alienates everyone in the society, not just the working class. Marx's assessment of capitalism and the fact that the majority of people in society contribute to

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23. I.e., that which makes them human according to Marx.

24. Dillon, *Introduction to Sociological Theory*, 48.

25. A theory to be developed in much greater depth in the early twentieth century by the groundbreaking psychological thinker Sigmund Freud.

the system, unknowingly working against their own better interest, establishes a pervasive experience of existential suffering.

Suffering has always been part of the human experience. This is the starting point of Iain Wilkinson's book *Suffering: A Sociological Introduction*.[26] As discussed in the book's introduction (and throughout this dissertation), the time that passes between Marx's work and Wilkinson's work (the beginning to mid-twentieth century) witnessed some of history's most horrific crimes against humanity. Additionally, the ever-increasing capacity to make knowledge of such events accessible around the world through technological advancements made the sad realities of this time period more impactful globally. Wilkinson argues that this increase in awareness of the suffering of others can and should be used as a tool to combat the systems, circumstances, and people that create suffering in the first place.[27]

Wilkinson suggests that suffering "appears to be fundamentally opposed to our humanity."[28] He explains that "the pain of suffering so dominates the senses that it cannot be simply ignored or blithely returned to its proper place. It is all at once excruciating and overwhelming."[29] Suffering, according to Wilkinson, has physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental consequences to the effect that it reduces humans to the experience of nothingness.[30]

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26. Iain Wilkinson, *Suffering: A Sociological Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

27. Perhaps another manifestation of what Taylor calls the theological.

28. Wilkinson, *Suffering*, 1.

29. Wilkinson, 1.

30. Liberation theologians would argue that the dehumanization created by suffering effects not only the person who suffers, but also those persons responsible for causing the suffering as well as witnesses to the suffering.

However, he also points out that suffering seems to be the place where the true nature of humanity can be most clearly perceived.[31]

According to Wilkinson, suffering is an experience that reveals the most basic truths about human life.[32] It is not only an experience universally common to humans, as it is also an *essential* experience of humanity, that is, it teaches people about what it means to be human.[33] Therefore, Wilkinson contends that sociologists and others who actively work to decrease suffering for persons all over the world must give careful attention to the existential realities of suffering as expressed by those people who suffer. Wilkinson's argument rests on the recognition of the utter subjectivity of the human experience, which understands that even a shared experience can be perceived, processed, and felt differently by each person involved. For this reason, Wilkinson calls suffering a "deeply personal" experience.[34]

Wilkinson asserts that within the modern era there has been a move toward a new humanitarianism that reflects people's concern and a desire to alleviate the suffering of others.[35] He situates the antecedents of this movement in the Enlightenment's successful fusion of reasonableness and a sentimental attachment to humanity. Wilkinson connects the growing strength of this movement in modernity to several factors, including access

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31. This is a point that Bonhoeffer knew quite well and that his works points toward in a way that many theologians did not take up as directly as he did in his writing prior to his death.

32. Wilkinson, *Suffering*, 2.

33. Wilkinson, 2. This also connects with Admirand's method of using personal narratives of atrocity to develop a meaningful contemporary theodicy and the validity of using memoir and other writings that are not necessarily formally academic but can be theologically significant.

34. Wilkinson, 112.

35. Wilkinson, 112.

to information about different peoples and places since the technological revolution and globalization, the emergence of a political rhetoric of civility, tolerance, and mutual respect in response to growing multiculturalism and plurality, and an increased capability for humans to feel compassion and empathy for their fellow humans.[36] Wilkinson argues that although modernity has been marked by commodification, rationalization, and oppressive political and social systems, it has also been characterized by an appeal to humanitarian sentimentality, charity, and motivation for social reform. Most recently, postmodern society has witnessed the rise of human benevolence as an active force in the public realm.[37]

Possibly most striking about Wilkinson's work is his suggestion that *despite* the powerful forces of modern greed, inhumanity, and oppression, there are a significant amount of human individuals and organizations that dedicate their lives to counteracting these forces in order to alleviate the suffering of others. What could be the motivation for such altruistic behavior? Wilkinson identifies cognitive awareness of the actuality of suffering, and its roots in social constructions, as a galvanizing force in bringing people into the work of alleviating suffering. He affirms that "the idea that we have a moral obligation to care about the suffering of others, by virtue of the fact that we share in a common humanity, is a particularly modern social trait."[38]

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36. Unfortunately, since Wilkinson's publication, society has witnessed a deterioration of civility in the political and public arenas. The presidency of Donald Trump, the emergence of "fake news," compassion fatigue, and the global COVID-19 pandemic have exposed a virulent underbelly of American society saturated with white supremacy.

37. See previous footnote.

38. Wilkinson, *Suffering*, 151.

## The Variability of Human Nature and its Infrastructure

Something that Marx and Wilkinson share, along with the vast majority of other scholars, is a recognition that humans have built unjust and/or unnatural structures of society. Inequality and oppression are human created phenomena that appear in some form in every period of human history. Conversely, these authors all point out the consistent and seemingly inherent power of the human person to change themselves and the world around them. Humans can transcend their sensory, biological, and even cognitive limitations through higher consciousness, with compassion, and by opposing suffering and injustice, even to the point of self-sacrifice.

What does it say about human nature that the world we have constructed is unjust and destructive to life? In the same vein, what does it say about human nature that there are, and have always been, humans who recognize unjust or destructive action and have taken altruist action against it? Which of these contradictory portraits of the human person reflects the true nature of humanity?

The only sensible conclusion is that both are true. Humans are both destructive, self-seeking tyrants, *and* compassionate, justice-minded, self-sacrificing global citizens. Human nature, therefore, must be seen as variable. This begs the question: what is it about the person that makes human nature variable? Furthermore, how does variability in human nature relate to the fragmentary understanding of human existence in the contemporary world and in theological methods as they are reflective of such?

Another common theme shared by the authors reviewed in the previous sections is the unique power of human consciousness. This unique power has been expressed both in terms of self-consciousness, as the ability for humans to transcend their cognitive state of

being, and in the form of the unconscious mind. Stating that humans "can be distinguished from animals by consciousness," Marx asserts that humanity's species-being (the essence of the human species) is higher consciousness (i.e. self-consciousness).[39] According to Marx, through the expression of consciousness in various productive skills and talents, humans give shape to the physical world in which they live. Therefore, the ability to create the circumstances of one's own existence is a distinctively human trait. It follows naturally from this assertion that society and its components are also human-created and, as such, can vary as much as humans do. Marx essential insight here is marking the malleability[40] of not only humanmade culture, but also, of the human being itself.

Marx also notes that human production is a collective endeavor. This highlights another trait that is constitutive of the human person, and, therefore, part of the infrastructure that allows variability in human nature—relationality. To say that human beings are inherently relational is to state the obvious. There has been much scholarship in different fields to examine the reality that human individuality is formed through relationships.[41] "Marx held that human reality was historical and changeable … and that

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39. Karl Marx, "*The German Ideology* and Historical Materialism," in *Classical Sociological Theory: A Reader*, ed. Ian McIntosh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 26.

40. Use of the word malleability here is not meant as a reference to a physical shaping of the human body (although, that is also relevant). Malleability here is used as the condition for the possibility of being changed without being broken by being shaped or molded.

41. i.e. the relationship a human person has with themselves, with other persons, with the natural world, with divine reality, and with society and its constructs. Since human consciousness is embodied within and influenced by the human body and its processes, biological and physiological characteristics of the human body also contribute to human's variability of nature and differentiation among other animals. Humans externalize their individuality and consciousness in the form of emotion and in the construction of collective institutions that are designed to give purpose and organization to human life. All of this indicates that humans are radically dependent and contextual, making the natural world not only their point of departure, but also integral to identity development.

human beings were constituted by their social relationships."[42] Marx also believed that "social existence determines consciousness."[43] These assertions seem contradictory to Marx's contention that humanity's ability to create its own existence is one of its defining aspects. It would seem as if Marx is saying that human consciousness shapes society *and* that human consciousness is shaped by society.

Peter Berger refers to this relationship as "socialization." Berger's central thesis is that society has an "inherently dialogical nature."[44] He affirms that human consciousness does shape society, *and, at the same time,* human consciousness is shaped by society. Berger explains that "society is a dialectic phenomenon in that it is a human product—one that continually acts back upon its producer."[45] His starting point echoes Marx's anthropology in that Berger affirms that "it is the nature of [humans] to build a world" through the natural expression of consciousness that has been called externalization.[46] Berger conceives of externalization as an anthropological necessity, meaning that a human's existence *is* externalization. Berger defines externalization as "the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of" human persons that constitutes "society as a human product."[47]

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42. Ross, *Anthropology*, 61.

43. Dillon, *Introduction to Sociological Theory*, 67.

44. Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 3.

45. Berger, 3.

46. Berger, 7.

47. Berger, 4.

The products of humanity's externalization activity take on a "degree of distinctiveness"[48] apart from their producer and thus become entities independent of their human source. In this way, externalized products attain objective properties. These constructs (which can be material or non-material) become an objective part of the world in which humans live. That is, they become part of "a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves."[49] Berger identifies this objectivation of human externalizing activity as the source of society as a *sui generis* reality. This is confirmed when reality is recognized by many people as a "shared facticity," that is, it is recognized by people in general, not just by an individual. Therefore, it is through communal recognition that objectivated reality remains "real."[50]

Once objectivated, an aspect of society, whether material or non-material, cannot be controlled by the humans from which it originally emerged as an externalization of consciousness. It cannot be re-apprehended as subjective output, but is now by virtue of its nature, something external and recognized as true by society. Berger explains further: "Above all, society manifests itself by its coercive power. The final test of objective reality is its capacity to impose itself upon the reluctance of individuals. Society directs, sanctions, controls, and punishes individual conduct."[51] Through its fundamentally coercive nature,[52]

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48. Berger, 8.

49. Berger, 4.

50. Berger, 10.

51. Berger, 11.

52. Berger, 12. Berger explains that "the fundamental coerciveness of society lies not in its machineries of social control, but in its power to constitute and impose itself as reality."

society influences human consciousness in a way that assimilates objective reality with the subjective identity of the person. Berger refers to this process as "internalization."

> Internalization is rather the reabsorption into consciousness of the objectivated world in such a way that the structures of this world come to determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself. That is, society now functions as the formative agency for individual consciousness. Insofar as internalization has taken place, the individual now apprehends various elements of the objectivated world as phenomena internal to his consciousness at the same time as he apprehends them as phenomena of external reality.[53]

Together, these three steps, externalization, objectivation, and internalization, constitute the process of socialization in Berger's understanding.

Berger's process of socialization assumes not only that humans are inherently relational, but also that humans are malleable. Berger explains that humans are the only creature that are born incomplete. This foundational aspect of humanity is what makes the process of externalization an essential necessity for human beings.[54] Echoing Marx's assertion that humans create the circumstances of their own existence, Berger talks about "world-building" as the essential task for human survival. Unlike other animals, humans are not born with a pre-determined "world" in which their biological drives (instincts) dictate their actions. Affirming the centrality of relationality for human development, Berger explains this in detail: "Unlike the other higher mammals, who are born with an essentially completed organism, [the human] is curiously 'unfinished' at birth."[55] Therefore, the

> process of "becoming [human]" occurs at a time when the human infant is in interaction with an extra-orgasmic environment, which includes both physical and the human world of the infant. There is thus a biological foundation to the process

53. Berger, 14–15.

54. Berger, 4.

55. Berger, 4.

> of "becoming [human]" in the sense of developing personality and appropriating culture.[56]

This is a phenomenon that is present throughout human life. The ability of the human person to change as a result of their life experience is a widely-recognized characteristic of the species. Ross also affirms that "human identities are … in flux."[57] She connects this aspect of humanity with the apprehension of culturally defined roles, such as gender roles.[58] Ross also recalls the well-known first century philosopher, Irenaeus of Lyons, pointing out that "to be human is to grow, change…. For Irenaeus human experience is key. God did not create us like angels, who know everything at once; rather, we 'slowly progress' and learn from our experience…. Our very humanity is a work in progress."[59]

## **Section B:** *Analogia relationis* **and** *Imago Dei*

### Reframing the Narrative: Analogia relationis[60]

In light of Lyotard's understanding of narrative as a fundamental aspect of culture that impacts a culture's stability or dynamism, along with Marx's emphasis on the malleability

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56. Berger, 4.

57. Ross, *Anthropology*, 70.

58. Ross, 70.

59. Ross, 15. It is also important to note that Berger's theory of socialization would necessitate continual theological recreation, reconstruction, and reinterpretation in order to be relevant to the continually changing socialized human person. Furthermore, one could argue that theories such as Hobbes's *Leviathan* are merely a snapshot of a specific socialized worldview. Hobbes' mistake was to universalize his understanding to all of human history. This is a mistake Christianity has also been particularly prone to make.

60. The following section dissects the creation stories in Genesis 1–3 as well as Bonhoeffer's commentary on these pieces. Both the scriptural passages and Bonhoeffer's work use the outdated gendered language of "man" to represent humanity. For the sake of consistency with the original documents (one of the commitments of this dissertation's method) I have not altered (corrected) this gendered language in my own discussion or quotations. However, that should not lead readers to think that I am not conscious of and opposed to the sexism inherent in such language. I reject

of the human person, and Berger's description of culture and humanity's inherent and intertwined socialization process, this section reconsiders the preeminent narrative of Christianity and human nature: the creation stories alongside Bonhoeffer's own exposition of Genesis 1–3. This discussion will bring together the major themes already examined in Bonhoeffer's legacy as well as in the history of the development of ideas that impacted the theological landscape of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, such as the fragmentary and contextually ambiguous nature of existence and how to embrace this through theological method and the centrality of conformation to Christ. These topics converge in Bonhoeffer's theory of *analogia relationis*—an analogy of relation. Bonhoeffer's exposition of Genesis reveals that the true *imago dei* is relationality and in so doing he offers contemporary theology a renewed way of thinking about the sovereignty of God, and consequently, the human concept of sovereign power as well (something that is sorely needed in the United States today, religiously and politically).

Bonhoeffer's completed his exposition of the creation narratives early in his career. Originally written as lectures that he delivered at the University of Berlin, these lectures were later published under the title *Creation and Fall*[61] and will be used as the hermeneutical

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gendered and sexist language in theological (and any scholarly) discourses as an ongoing tool of suppression put to use by the structurally oppressive systems of patriarchy that continue to dominate the academic world.

61. *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3* (German edition ed. Martin Rüter and Ilse Tödt, English edition ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax, DBWE 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997)) is neither as well-known nor rigorously studied as his other publications. Despite this, John W. De Gruchy points out that it is "important for the study of Bonhoeffer, providing a link between his earlier, seminal writings (*Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*) and those that later were to make such as impact on the theology … in the twentieth century ([*The Cost of*] *Discipleship*, *Ethics*, and *Letters and Papers from Prison*). In it, he reworks ideas from his earlier writings in ways that anticipate their development and expression in his later writings. Indeed *Creation and Fall* represents a turning point in Bonhoeffer's theological development and as such is

lens for examining the scripture passages (in conjunction with the aforementioned authors). In creating his lectures on *Creation and Fall*, Bonhoeffer was grappling with the challenge of reconciling the seeming contradictions presented in traditional Christian anthropological and cosmological teachings versus modern theological scholarship and in light of historical events and context.

Many traditional Christian teachings presents human nature as "fallen" and "sinful"[62] using the Edenic mythology of the expulsion of the first humans from God's created Paradise at the beginning of human history. Alternately, human nature has also been described as the *imago dei* in Catholic tradition, based on the stories of human creation contained in Genesis books 1–3, among other sources found throughout the Christian tradition[63]

The following exposition also seeks to place the discussion of the variability of human nature into dialogue with these more traditional Catholic teachings about human nature, which present humans as having a definitive nature as either good or bad.[64] More specifically, I consider whether variability in human nature can be linked directly to a theological notion of the fragmentary as an ontological reality. Such as ontological reality would necessitate

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of particular significance for our understanding of it" (De Gruchy, "Listening to the Word of God in a Winter of Discontent," editor's introduction to the English edition of *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:6).

62. Cf. note 373.

63. Although the word "nature" can have many meanings, when I use the phrase "human nature" in this dissertation, I am referring to that which makes humans distinct from other animals and created beings. When talking about the nature of humanity, I am also referring to that which all humans have in common, an innate quality or characteristic that is inextricably constitutive of every human person.

64. The field of theology in general wrestled with these issues at the turn of the twentieth century (whether via liberalism, neo-scholasticism, or neo-orthodoxy theology). Bonhoeffer in particular took up the challenge by creating lectures based on a theological exposition of the creation stories, which were later published as *Creation and Fall*.

the prioritization of an intimate relationship with God in order to shape and direct (through innate human malleability) human nature to the good, such as in Bonhoeffer's proposal of conformation to Christ. This discussion begins with an introduction to his exposition of Genesis 1–3.

Bonhoeffer gave his lectures on *Creation and Fall*[65] during a time

> of profound discontent in Germany; it was also a time of confusion, anxiety, and, for many, false hope, as social and political upheavals led to the demise of the Weimar Republic and the birth of the Third Reich. In the midst of these events Bonhoeffer called his students to focus their attention on the word of God as the word of truth in time of turmoil.[66]

Systematic theologians at the time ignored the publication of *Creation and Fall*, which he considered to be a "theological exposition of Genesis 1–3."[67] Similar to the reception Barth received when publishing *The Epistle to the Romans*,[68] in response to *Creation and Fall* "most biblical scholars scorned Bonhoeffer's Barthian method of 'theological exegesis.'"[69] It is clear that Bonhoeffer's choice to teach these lectures at this time was at least inconsistent if not antithetical to the academic community at large.

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65. John de Gruchy points out that Bonhoeffer's lectures were published under this title because Bonhoeffer's student's urged him to do so. He explains: "The students' urging that this particular course of university lectures be published resulted in its being the only one to have been preserved in its entirety in Bonhoeffer's own words. Apart from scanty notes, all records of his other lecture courses at Berlin have been lost" ("Listening to the Word of God," DBWE 3:2).

66. De Gruchy, 3:1.

67. De Gruchy, 3:2.

68. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

69. De Gruchy, 3:6.

De Gruchy explains that "by the 1930s when Bonhoeffer was lecturing, many biblical scholars and other people, especially in Germany, regarded the first chapters of Genesis as primitive tales of little relevance for modern people."[70] This was in large part due to the emergence of modern and critical scholarship together with the scientifical revolution which had rendered the worldview of biblical creation as an accurate account of the beginning of the world untenable.[71] However, due to this, there was much confusion among Christians in general about how to regard the creation narratives—and the entire bible—and, therefore, how to think about God and the origin of the world.[72] This "resulted in a crisis that disoriented European culture regarding the place of humankind in time and history,"[73] which, as discussed in chapter 3, contributed to the success of Hitler's strategy of developing his own pseudo-religious ideology.

De Gruchy also explains that

> Barth, by contrast, in a way that was very controversial at the time, sought to develop a 'post-critical' method of expounding scripture. That is, he in principal accepted the findings of historical and literary criticism but sought to move beyond them to grapple with the question, What is the word of God as it addresses itself to us today in the scripture? Bonhoeffer likewise sought to grapple with the same question.[74]

Using scripture as witness to the living God, just as Barth did, throughout the lectures, Bonhoeffer was "intensely concerned with the question: How can these words live? How can they once more be heard not just as the expression of an ancient cosmology

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70. De Gruchy, 3:6.

71. De Gruchy, 3:6.

72. De Gruchy, 3:7.

73. De Gruchy, 3:7.

74. De Gruchy, 3:7–8.

and worldview but as God's word to humankind in the twentieth century, in all its sin and confusion?"[75] He delivered the lectures "with passion and kerygmatic style rather than in the language of academic discourse."[76] De Gruchy continues

> [Bonhoeffer's] concern was to hear the word of God that had spoken in the beginning—and that was seeking even then to speak to Germany and the nations of the world. It is a word that still addresses us in our own situations out of the silence of the universe in the redemptive power of the Crucified.[77]

As a student listening to these lectures in the classroom, Hans Hinrich Flöter described Bonhoeffer while giving these lectures as

> a man who dug deeply … who from 'a point of view outside history—so it seemed to me—found in the text new things of basic importance for life and understanding…. In these lectures this extraordinary man, Bonhoeffer, exploded everything I had taken for granted as custom or tradition in theology/the church, the state/politics, academic scholarship/research and so on.[78]

Bonhoeffer's focus in this transitional time for his theology and in these lectures is on the question of human nature,[79] and his main point throughout is that human sociality (or relationality) is the central meaning of the *imago dei*.[80] The stabilizing and foundational force of these lectures in connection to both Bonhoeffer's earlier and later works is his steadfast Christocentrism, which is the lens through which he reads the creation

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75. De Gruchy, 3:8.

76. De Gruchy, 3:5.

77. De Gruchy, 3:5.

78. De Gruchy, 3:3. De Gruchy further explains that these lectures represent "a turning point in Bonhoeffer's development from an abstruse academic theologian whose context was solely the university to a theologian for preachers. As his later writings and his work for the church show, he was now to be more and more concerned with the witness of the church to the word of God in the world" (8).

79. De Gruchy, 3:10.

80. De Gruchy, 3:11.

narratives.[81]Accordingly, he begins his lectures explaining the centrality of Christ to creation: "the story of creation must be read in a way that begins with Christ and only then moves on toward him as its goal; indeed one can read it as a book that moves toward Christ only when one knows that Christ is the beginning the new, the end of our whole world."[82]

Bonhoeffer presents the two creation narratives as two sides of the same story and asserts that either one without the other could not convey the true meaning of creation for Christians."[83] He explains:

> The first account is thought out wholly from above, from where God is … The second account by contrast is about the world in its nearness and about the Lord who is near on earth, living together with Adam in Paradise. The first account is about humankind-for-God, the second about God-for-humankind…. The second account tells the story of humankind—the first is about what God does; but the second is about the history of humanity with God.[84]

In the first account of creation to appear in Genesis, humans are created as the climax of creation and as the creature that will have dominion over all the earth (Genesis 1:26). God

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81. De Gruchy, 3:3. Bonhoeffer understands and emphasizes that "Christ is the cosmic word of God that speaks from the center of world history." However, De Gruchy points out that while writing what came to be incorporated as *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Bonhoeffer came to read the New Testament through the lens of the Hebrew Scriptures, a reversal of the way in which he read it for these lectures). De Gruchy attributes part of Bonhoeffer's motivation in reading each scriptural text through a hermeneutical lens of the other was at least partly to counteract the Christian tendency at the time to deny scriptural significance to the Hebrew scriptures, a practice that undoubtedly "contributed to a dualistic separation of creation and redemption and of the public and the private spheres of life." De Gruchy (like Bonhoeffer) links this approach to the pervasive anti-Semitism among German Christians. "Bonhoeffer's own growing love for the Old Testament contributed a great deal to his quite different approach. This love, which is already so apparent in *Creation and Fall*, was expressed in prison writings … His later biblical insight into the 'worldliness' of Christianity in 'a world come of age' is also rooted in his understanding that the New Testament must be read in the light of the Old" (De Gruchy, DBWE 3:10, referencing Bonhoeffer's letter to Eberhard Bethge, June 27, 1944, in *Letters and Papers from Prison, DBWE 8:335–337)*.

82. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:22.

83. Bonhoeffer, 3:71.

84. Bonhoeffer, 3:71–72.

proposes: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Genesis 1:27 continues: "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them."

In the second account of creation, God creates man before the other creatures, "the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). In Genesis 2:18 God also creates woman: "The Lord God said: 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.'" After unsuccessfully trying to meet man's companionship needs with several animals, God determines that the appropriate partner for man must come from within the man himself:

> So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:21–23).

Regarding Genesis 1:20–25[85] specifically, Bonhoeffer argues that "something totally new occurs" when "the Creator wills that the creation should itself, in obedience, endorse and carry on the Creator's work—wills that creatures should live and should in turn themselves create life."[86] Bonhoeffer points out that the work of creation, that is the work which makes

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85. "And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.' And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good."

86. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:57.

God *God* as creator, is freely given to creation by God. "God gives to God's work that which makes God Lord, namely the ability to create. God calls it to life."[87] Bonhoeffer argues that this indicates God's disinterest in being Lord over a "dead, eternally unchangeable, subservient world; instead God wills to be Lord of life with its infinite variety of forms."[88] In this quote, Bonhoeffer is using the terms "life" and "death" based on his understanding of freedom in creation, where that which is free or self-determining and malleable (has the capacity to change and create) is alive whereas that which is contingent and static is dead.[89] Bonhoeffer uses this understanding as the basis for his interpretation of *imago dei*.

Acknowledging that understanding relationality to be a core aspect of the intrinsic nature of the Christian God has long been firmly established in the doctrine of the trinity,[90] Bonhoeffer builds on this reality in connection to his understanding of creaturely freedom as derived from the creation narratives to establish this relationality as the true meaning of *imago dei*.

> In the free creature the Holy Spirit worships the Creator; uncreated freedom glorifies itself in view of created freedom. The creature loves the Creator, because the Creator loves the creature. Created *freedom* is freedom in the Holy Spirit, but as *created* freedom it is *humankind's* own freedom. How does this created existence of a free humankind express itself? In what way does the freedom of the Creator differ from the freedom of that which is created? How is the creature free? The creature is free in that one creature exists in relation to another creature, in that one human being is free for another human being. And God created them man and woman. The human being

87. Bonhoeffer, 3:57.

88. Bonhoeffer, 3:57. These assertions of Bonhoeffer will be very relevant to the discussion of human freedom later in the chapter.

89. Bonhoeffer explains freedom in creation in great detail in the lecture sections "That Which Lives" and "The Image of God on Earth" (3:56–67).

90. Bonhoeffer, 3:64.

> is not alone. Human beings exist in duality, and it is in this *dependence on the other that their creatureliness consists*.[91]

Bonhoeffer goes on to explain that human freedom (what Bonhoeffer qualifies as life) is not merely one quality among others that humans possess. Rather, human existence is *defined* by an "in-dependence-upon-one-another."[92] Therefore, Bonhoeffer asserts "the likeness, the analogia, of humankind to God is not analogia entis but *analogia relationis*.[93] As I have argued in this dissertation, this relational analogy can be understood as an authentic theological response to existential fragmentation and variability in human nature. Fragmentation and variability, as ontological realities, are also relational by nature and thus they are dynamic. Therefore, in an ontological reality characterized by fragmentation, ambiguity, and variability, there can be no static, hegemonic (that is, orthodox) notion of a sovereign divine being in relation to a static, powerful, created human being, such as in a traditional concept of *analogia entis*. However, Bonhoeffer's *analogia relationis*, alternatively, offers dynamic possibilities for theology to embrace the realities of fragmentation, ambiguity, and variability—things he embodied not only theologically, but also with his life.

I understand that what I am suggesting may seem provocative and that some theological nuance is missing from this discussion. I want to be clear that I am not attempting to invalidate the long held concepts of God modelled on a traditional analogy of being. Nor do I intend to imply that the concepts of an analogy of being and an analogy of relation are mutually exclusive concepts.

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91. Bonhoeffer, 3:64.

92. Bonhoeffer, 3:64.

93. Analogy of relation (Bonhoeffer, 3:65).

My interest is in raising questions about *how we want to be who we are in the world*. Both an analogy of being and an analogy of relation allow that as Christians we base the question of how we ought to be on who God is. Indeed, in this sense no formal or proper theological distinction may exist between an analogy of being and an analogy of relation. However, what Bonhoeffer was doing—and what I am trying to do as many other Catholic and Christian theologians in the twenty-first century have also done—is to shift the focus of the conversation. Furthermore, I am interested in shifting the goal of the conversation, for I do not aim to offer answers to the questions raised by these discussions. My hope is that the discussion will create ambiguity, which itself will allow for new ways of being to emerge. For, it is the process of wrestling with the ambiguity, seeking answers for oneself and among each other that allows new possibilities to come to life.

Bonhoeffer explains that *analogia relationis* is "the relation which God has established, and it is analogia only in this relation which God has established. The relation of creature with creature is a relation established by God, because it consists of freedom and freedom comes from God."[94] God, in God's own being is relationality. God creates humans out of God's own relationship nature to reflect God. God gifts humanity with God's own power to create (i.e. freedom, the central characteristic of life) and God frames this power within the structure of relational freedom. That is what *imago dei* as *analogia relationis* means.

De Gruchy points out that *Creation and Fall* is the only book of Bonhoeffer's that Barth commented on within Bonhoeffer's lifetime.[95] De Gruchy also notes that Barth would

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94. Bonhoeffer, 3:65–66.

95. De Gruchy, "Listening to the Word of God," DBWE 3:11. De Gruchy points readers to Clifford J. Green, *The Sociality of Christ and Humanity: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Early Theology, 1927–1933*, American Academy of Religion Dissertation Series 6 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1972), 286 n. 19.

go onto appropriate Bonhoeffer's concept of *analogia relationis*, using it in the development of his theory of *analogia fidei*, his own contrast to *analogia entis*.[96] Barth's analogy of faith relies on the innate relationship between humans and God of Bonhoeffer's *analogia relationis* for the possibility of God's self-revelation.

## Imago Dei: Relationality

Perhaps the most obvious consequence humanity suffers as a result of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden is the distance it placed between humans and God. Being creatures of the post-Edenic world prevents humans from being in the direct presence of, and unable to have direct interaction with God. Furthermore, in the Garden, everything needed for human survival *and* peaceful existence was provided by God. Now, humans must labor to provide the basic essentials of life, and in far too many cases even these are denied.

Humans must literally create their own world, by organizing nature through the work of their hands, as Marx has identified, and, as Berger has emphasized, by shaping society through the process of socialization. At first glance, this may seem like God abandoning humanity to its own works. Considering human history through the lens of monumental atrocities and their aftermath suggests, as Wilkinson pointed out, humans have both failed miserably and laudably succeeded in using these gifts for the betterment of all creation. But, Bonhoeffer takes care to remind us that the idea that God has abandoned humankind outside of Eden is false.

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96. De Gruchy, "Listening to the Word of God," DBWE 3:11.

In the first lecture of his series in *Creation and Fall*, Bonhoeffer argues that "part of being human is knowing that we cannot actually conceive of "in the beginning."[97] This is because "humankind no longer lives in the beginning; instead it has lost the beginning. Now it finds itself in the middle, knowing neither the end nor the beginning, and yet knowing that it is in the middle."[98] Bonhoeffer points out here that human beings (including human consciousness and all of human reality) are dictated by Jesus Christ, who is truly the beginning and end of all things.[99] Thus, human life exists "in the middle" and cannot conceive of a world outside of or temporally "before" Jesus Christ. We can see here seeds of thought for what Bonhoeffer will later express in his ideas about "religionless Christianity," which will be discussed in more detail below.

Because humans are in the middle and can only be in the middle, they can make no definite statements, or even clarifying thoughts, on the actuality of the beginning. This is one of the first times in his writings that Bonhoeffer will write about fragmentation as inherent to human existence: "Because thinking wants to reach back to the beginning and yet never can … all thinking pounds itself to pieces, shatters against itself, breaks up into fragments, dissolves, in view of the beginning."[100] We can see from this quote that

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97. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:25, as in the first line of Genesis, "In the beginning…."

98. Bonhoeffer, 3:28.

99. Bonhoeffer, 3:26. On the same page, Bonhoeffer expounds: "Our thinking, that is, the thinking of those who have to turn to Christ to know about God, the thinking of all humankind, lacks a beginning because it is a circle. We think in a circle. But we also feel in a circle. We exist in a circle. It is possible to say that in that case the beginning is everywhere. But against that stands the equally valid statement that for that very reason there is no beginning at all."

100. Bonhoeffer, 3:27.

Bonhoeffer understood that human existence was necessarily fragmented throughout all time, not only in the historical context of the modern era. For Bonhoeffer, fragmentation is the ontological reality of the created human person. Thus, humankind makes the mistake of assuming that life is truly determined by these two factors and as such humankind despairs "because it comes from the beginning and is moving toward the end without knowing what that means."[101]

Here Bonhoeffer uncovers the greatest lie humanity ever told itself: that itself is the beginning and the end. Reinforcing the Christocentrism of his theological anthropology, Bonhoeffer explains:

> Who can speak of the beginning? There are two possibilities. The speaker may be the one who has been a liar form the beginning,[102] the evil one for whom the beginning is the lie and the lie is the beginning, whom human beings believe because the evil one deceives them with lies. And as one who lies, the evil one will say: I am the beginning, and you, O humankind, are the beginning. You were with me from the beginning. I have made you what you are, and with me your end is done away. I am the Beginning and the End, the A[lpha] and the O[mega];[103] worship me. I am the truth out of which comes the lie; for I am the lie that first gives birth to the truth. You are the beginning and you are the end, for you are in me. Believe me, the liar from the beginning; lie, and you will be in the beginning and will be lord of the truth. Discover your beginning yourself. So speaks the evil one, as the liar from the beginning. It is either *the evil one* who speaks or that other who speaks, the one who has been the truth from the beginning, and the way, and the life [John 14:6], the one who was in the beginning, the very God, Christ, the Holy Spirit. No one can speak of the beginning but the one who was in the beginning.[104]

Here Bonhoeffer points to Christ as *the one* who was there in the beginning, as the only one who can speak of the truth from the beginning because he was the beginning.

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101. Bonhoeffer, 3:28.

102. cf. John 8:44; reference provided by editorial notes in Bonhoeffer, 3:28.

103. cf. Rev 1:8, reference provided by editorial notes in Bonhoeffer, 3:28.

104. Bonhoeffer, 3:28–29; cf. John 1:1–2; reference provided by editorial notes.

This is why conformation in relationship with Christ is so crucial for humans. Christ is the wholeness of time, the beginning, the center and the end.

This pronouncement also foreshadows Bonhoeffer's assertion in *Discipleship* and *Ethics* that that which poses the greatest threat to lead humans astray is their own heart and their own will. Hence, the need for reliance on God's will through conformation to Christ.[105] In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer revisits creation and the fall continuing his explanation of both *analogia relationis* and the human mistake of seeking knowledge in (or even for) themselves:

> The knowledge of good and evil[106] seems to be the goal of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge…. Already in the possibility of the knowledge of good and evil Christian ethics discerns a falling away from the origin. Humankind at its origin knows only one thing: God…. The knowledge of good and evil indicates something as having preceded it: the separation of humankind from its origin. In the knowledge of good and evil, humankind does not understand itself in the reality of the particular character received form its origin, but instead in terms of its own possibilities, its possibility of being good or evil. It knows itself now as something apart from God, something outside of God…. The knowledge of good and evil thus involved being separated from God. Humankind knows about good and evil only in opposition to God."[107]

Bonhoeffer points out that this tendency of humankind to put itself at the center is the real disobedience to God, [108] and that human conscience is actually a "hiding away" or fleeing from God.[109]

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105. A longer discussion of these ideas can be found in chapter 2.

106. The knowledge of good and evil is that which Adam and Eve supposedly sought/ received in eating from the tree of knowledge. However, Bonhoeffer presents an alternative theory that exposes the motivation of the serpent to appear to be "for God," thus situating the root of evil in a misapprehension of God's will. See "The Pious Question" in *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:103–110.

107. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, *DBWE 6*:301–302.

108. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:117.

109. Bonhoeffer, 3:128. In the same section, Bonhoeffer proclaims that "Conscience means feeling shame before God…Conscience is not the voice of God within sinful human beings; instead it

Here Bonhoeffer reframed traditional understandings of human ethics (knowing right from wrong) and conscience within the foundation of *analogia relationis*. He did this by establishing Christ as the source of all human knowledge of good and evil. Bonhoeffer is setting the stage for the theme of conformation to Christ that emerges in his later publications by stating unequivocally that any ethics which situates itself in anything other than the human relationship with God is necessarily disobedience, fleeing from God and falling away from true and just actions. For, as Bonhoeffer contends throughout his publications, true knowledge of good and evil is not only dependent solely on God, but also on the situation. Bonhoeffer makes sure that there is not even the possibility that humans could know good from evil as the condition for that possibility is *analogia relationis*.

The question of discerning Christ and the will of God in the world is another theme central to this dissertation. As discussed in more detail in the previous two chapters and above, the need to embrace contextual fragmentation and contextual ambiguity (as well as variability in human nature) as ontological realties is built into God's plan from the beginning, hence the need for *analogia relationis*.

This is true because the essential nature of human beings is relationality. This relationality is also that which is reflective of the triune God (*imago dei*). Human nature is neither inherently good nor bad, but it is shaped by the multifaceted context of the world and by the innate human capacity for growth and development (malleability). Therefore, we can consider human nature to be variable as based on one's socialization into the world, one's thoughts and behaviors can tend in certain directions.

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is precisely their defense against this voice."

Since humans are neither good nor bad by nature, but they are instead relational the way that the triune God is relational (*analogia relationis*), humans must rely on their relationship with God to discern good and bad. Bonhoeffer offers a model for this relationship with God as conformation to Christ, acknowledging that the proper place of Christ is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all time. This means that Christ is the ever-present animator of existence. Christ is the relationship itself.

However, humans, whose existence only afford them knowledge of a place in the middle of time, or the middle of all existence, can easily mistake themselves as the locust of good and evil. Since humans do not have knowledge of the whole—they do not know the beginning and the end—they cannot apprehend the underlying fragmented nature of their entire existence. An existence made whole in Christ, who is the beginning, the middle, and the end. Therefore, conformation to Christ is not only the process of discerning good from evil, but also the source of holy wholeness.

The analogy of relationality that Bonhoeffer proposes offers a comprehensive theological response that can authentically grasp human existence given these realities. This relationality, like the inner-trinitarian relationship is not a means to an end in the traditional sense. The end or the goal of this relationship is not to reach a point where one always makes good, right, or correct decisions, as a traditional code of ethics would have as its end. Although, good decisions are a desired outcome of growing in conformation to Christ, truly embracing the ambiguity of one's context necessitates the possibilities of being wrong, or even, being guilty. However, *analogia relationis* is an unbreakable bond. As Bonhoeffer believed, engaging deeply in *analogia relationis* allows one to embrace contextual ambiguity (even the ambiguity of not knowing whether what one does is ultimately right or wrong)

because it is in the relationship where God enters human existence, not in the decision or in the consequence. Therefore, although *analogia relationis* does not have a specific end, it does have a direction. The direction of *analogia relationis*, the direction of conforming to Christ, is a love that says "I free you." Thus, the *analogia relationis* is a direct response, is God's direct response, to the fragmentation, ambiguity, and variability of the human condition.

## Section C: A Love that Says "I Free You"

> Now by love I don't mean indulgence. I don't mean sentimentality. By *love* I mean a condition that we are capable of and desperate for, which envelops and sustains and supports and encourages and doesn't even have to touch. … I mean love that passes all understanding, that recognizes that if we are the source of all humanity, then we are sisters and brothers. … I mean love that says, *I free you*. Because only when we are free can we do the work of mending the world.[110]

### Christ the Center

It is precisely at the intersection of Christianity's "definitive knowledge" and the lived human experience that reinterpretation must take place if it is to be both relevant to contemporary life and consistent with Christian truth. Not only is the community of believers served well by the continual reinterpretation of foundational Christian law, but also this is a way for the founding constitution of the Church to be kept alive.

Bonhoeffer provided an excellent example of reinterpretation done on the basis of scripture and taking seriously institutional traditions when he developed his lectures on *Creation and Fall*. In it "we see Bonhoeffer's own ability and willingness to listen to and trust that word and obey its command."[111] De Gruchy categorizes this ability as "evangelical obedience" and he connects it with Bonhoeffer's life decisions or "masterful expressions" of

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110. Maya Angelou, "Great Expectations," preface to *Mending the World: Stories of Family by Contemporary Black Writers*, ed. Rosemarie Robotham (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), xii.

111. De Gruchy, "Listening to the Word of God," DBWE 3:9.

this obedience when he later writes *Discipleship* and still later becomes a conspirator in a plot to kill Hitler at the risk of his own life.[112] In all of these actions, we see how "Bonhoeffer was seeking in a different way to be obedient to God"[113] and to be a witness of "God's judgement and salvation to Nazi Germany."[114] Perhaps, instead of evangelical obedience, we should consider these actions part of Bonhoeffer's conformation to Christ. In fact, while Bonhoeffer was in prison for the actions he took against Hitler and the Nazi regime, he reflected considerably on what it meant to follow Christ, that is, to be a Christian, in his context. It was during this time that Bonhoeffer wrote some of his more famous letters reflecting on "religionless Christianity."

Bonhoeffer scholar Christian Gremmels explains that the term "religionless," theologically speaking, functions as an auxiliary word to convey the much deeper question of how one can witness to the presence of Jesus Christ in the modern world (i.e. the present moment).[115] In the letter to Bethge[116] in which he first mentions the concept of religionless Christianity, Bonhoeffer actually starts the discussion with a poignant question for Christianity,

> What keeps gnawing at me is the question, What is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today? The age when we could tell people that with words—whether with theological or with pious words—is past, as is the age of inwardness and

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112. De Gruchy, 3:9.

113. De Gruchy, 3:9.

114. De Gruchy, 3:9.

115. Christian Gremmels, editor's afterward to the German edition, trans. Douglas W. Stott, in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, DBWE 8 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 588.

116. Tegel, April 30, 1944, in Bonhoeffer, 8:361–367.

> conscience, and that means the age of religion altogether. We are approaching a completely religionless age; people as they are now simply cannot be religious anymore. Even those who honestly describe themselves as 'religious' aren't really practicing that at all; they presumably mean something quite different than 'religious.'"[117]

Later in the letter Bonhoeffer continues:

> How do we talk about God—without religion, that is without the temporally conditioned presupposition of metaphysics, the inner life, and so on? How do we speak (or perhaps we can no longer even 'speak' the way we used to) in a 'worldly' way about 'God'? How do we go about being 'religionless-worldly' Christians, how can we be … those who are called out, without understanding ourselves religiously as privileged, but instead seeing ourselves as belonging while to the world? Christ would then no longer be the object of religion, but something else entirely, truly lord of the world.[118]

For Bonhoeffer the term 'religionless' was not an accusation of falsehood, a denial, or a contradiction. It was a challenge,[119] an invitation even, a word used in an attempt to capture the very present and urgent need for creative reinterpretation of traditions. It was also a way of embracing religious fragmentation; the fragmentation of Christianity and of belief in the twentieth century.[120]

Bonhoeffer's concept of religionless Christianity cannot be considered apart from his emphasis on "worldliness," by which Bonhoeffer meant the "christologically grounded

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117. Bonhoeffer, 8:362; think here of the countless Christians in Germany who either turned a blind eye to the horrors of Nazism or participated in the atrocities.

118. Bonhoeffer, 8:364.

119. Gremmels writes, "In Bonhoeffer's view 'religionlessness' is not a refutation but a challenge to a Christianity that asks: 'How can Christ become Lord of the religionless as well?'" (editor's afterward, DBWE 8:589).

120. One way of talking about the fragmentation of Christianity even prior to the twentieth century is to consider the variability in Christian "options" or in Christian denominations, sects, and churches.

togetherness of God and world."[121] Gremmels draws from a letter Bonhoeffer wrote to Bethge (Tegel, July 16, 1944) and other sources to explain:

> The God who 'consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross' establishes his relationship with us precisely by abandoning us.[122] Without God we do not live without the God who does not allow us to live without him. 'And this is precisely what we do recognize—before God! God himself compels us to recognize it…. God would have us know that we must live as those who manage their lives without God.' Participation in God's omnipotence as procured by religion is replaced by 'participation in the being of Jesus,' an exchange—'the opposite of everything a religious person excepts from God'—that Bonhoeffer described as liberating, 'joyous exchange': A person is permitted to do what he or she must in any case do before God; 'our lives are *allowed* to be 'worldly.' This is a Christianity that in religionlessness finds its way back to being Christian.[123]

Even in his "religionless" musings, Bonhoeffer is seeking Christ, the Christ who is the fullest revelation of the triune Christian creator God who allowed God's own self to be pushed out of the world onto the cross. Christ is broken into fragments, in life his clothing torn from his body, his blood from his side; in death, his life presented in snippets, his teachings debated, his truths truncated to fit other purposes. Christ who is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, the circle that gives meaning to both human beginnings and human ends. Christ the center of *analogia relationis*. Christ, to whom we seek to conform.

## The Freedom of Christ

M. Shawn Copeland asserts that Jesus symbolically reveals "the true nature of divine power … in the vulnerability of the crucified—and in the resurrection of the crucified."[124] She

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121. Gremmels, editor's afterward, DBWE 8:590.

122. Note that even the act of abandonment is a relational act.

123. Gremmels, editor's afterward, DBWE 8:590.

124. M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 29.

contends that we should not think of the violent and tragic death of Jesus as "purposely willed by God," nor should we insist that Jesus' death on the cross was necessary, for both of these positions can lead to misunderstandings.[125] God's action in response to Jesus' condemnation reveals that the way God uses divine power contradicts the human concept of power.[126] This power is revealed both in Jesus' own response to his situation and in God's action toward Jesus in the Resurrection.

Copeland affirms that God does not intervene, but rather, God responds to the people's act of violence against Jesus by resurrecting Jesus from the dead and transforming him into a transcendent being. This reaction reflects a God who acts through immanent and intimate relationship with Jesus and not through distant sovereign action, such as a God whose chooses to reflect God's self in humans through an analogy of relation. This reaction also reflects the loving and healing nature of God, versus an all-powerful display of displeasure and vengeance against Jesus' persecutors.[127] We can also see the relevance of Bonhoeffer's radically incarnational Christology here, as even at the time of Jesus death birth, God responds wholly with and from within the created world.

Copeland further emphasizes that the Resurrection was God's response to the actions Jesus himself took to bring about human salvation.[128] Jesus answered condemnation and

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125. Copeland, 27.

126. Copeland, 27. The post-Holocaust German theologian Jürgen Moltmann and his book, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993)), make an excellent dialogue partner here.

127. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 28.

128. Copeland, 29.

torture with a self-emptying, self-renouncing love that reveals the nature of divine love for creation.[129]

> The violence inflicted on Jesus is met with defenseless love, a love that will finally disarm all violence. Sin is met with forgiveness. The death Jesus experiences becomes the beginning of victory over death for the whole creation. In the power of the Spirit, God transforms sin, violence, and death into new life in Christ.[130]

In light of this, and like Bonhoeffer, Copeland asserts that the Christian gospel is an invitation to change, which holds the life of Jesus Christ as the standard against which that change is measured.[131] This change calls for self-transcendence in the form of self-surrender to the divine will, what Copeland calls "lived transformation in discipleship"[132] and what Bonhoeffer calls conformation to Christ. This call to surrender and discipleship relies on the free response of humans to cooperate and on their desire to conform to Christ in *analogia relationis*. The relationality analogy offers not only a response to the fragmentary nature of existence, the brokenness of the world and of the body, but also it then gives us a new, or a renewed way of thinking about the nature of transcendence. Transcendence is thus not a claim to sovereign power (be it divine or worldly power) but rather a bond shared in relation to others, in discipleship, in community, in interdependency as communion with one another.

## A Love That Says I Free You

Creation is the gift of God's own self, and God's own self is relationality (*analogia relationis*). The direction of that relationship is love, a love that says *I free you*. God's creative intent is

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129. Copeland, 27.

130. Copeland, 31.

131. Copeland, 6.

132. Copeland, 6.

being itself. Existence in and of itself, acting freely for itself, is God's design. This concept involves more than affirming that God *bestows* freedom upon creation. In creation, divine action takes the form of passivity by allowing the created to *be*, to develop or even to destruct, by its own determination. God's is a love that says *I free you*. It is a love that allows existence to continually transcend itself by engaging created entities from within their own freedom and agency. It is through the gift and grace of *analogia relationis* that God makes this possible.

Freedom is the essential condition of created existence to be self-determinant. As discussed in chapter 2, innate human malleability and the variability of nature provide a foundation for the freedom of created existence to determine its own course within the physical limitations of the universe. Due to the corporeal nature of human existence, all human encounters with God (that is, all revelation and religious experience) are mediated by elements that are of this world, and therefore mired in the fragmentary understanding that characterizes all human existence and theological explanation. Therefore, freedom as self-determination is also the primary mediator for human encounter with God, as well as for any theologically responsible statement. Our entire understanding of divine transcendence can be reframed as a more relational experience rather than a divinely sovereign form imposed upon humanity in a political, hegemonic fashion.

Freedom is also that which God uses to bring about good for all created existence. In *Creation and Fall*, Bonhoeffer contends that the Creator alone is good and, therefore, what makes creation (or "the work" as Bonhoeffer refers to it) good is the Creator's gaze upon it.[133] Bonhoeffer explains that creation is:

133. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:59.

> 'good' only in the way that the creaturely can be good, that is, by the Creator's looking upon it, acknowledging it as the Creator's own, and saying about it, 'It is good.' That God looks upon God's work is the only thing that makes the work good. This really means, however, that the work is good only because the Creator alone is good. The work never has its goodness in itself, but only in the Creator. The goodness of the work consists precisely in its pointing emphatically away from itself to the Creator and to the Creator's word alone as that which is good—that is, in its pointing out that 'none is good but God alone' … And the creature's being good … consists in this: that it lets the Creator, as the only Lord, be good and receive its own being good from the Creator's word alone and knows this word alone to be good.

The world and all creatures in it are "conditioned" or contingent upon God's goodness for their own.[134] Bonhoeffer explains that this goodness arises out of freedom and is transmuted to humans via *analogia relationis*. He argues: "To say that in humankind, God creates God's own image on earth means that humankind is like the Creator in that it is free. To be sure, it is free only through God's creation, through the word of God."[135] This is why the love that *says* "I free you" has to come from God through conformation to Christ where Christ is the relationship of the *analogia relationis*. Only God can be trusted as that which is good, not ourselves.

However, free will allows humans to choose self-determination over the good. Thus, God's love requires the cooperation of created existence. Humans can choose to cooperate with or to deny God's offering. As such, God's action is not in contest or conflict with the laws of the natural world or cosmic processes. To the contrary, God works with and from within these structures, patiently respecting the freedom of all created things which is inherently performed in an always fragmentary world.

This is the foundation of a love that says *I free you*.

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134. Bonhoeffer states, "Even in its living nature" the world is "conditioned—because, though it arises out of freedom, it itself is not free but conditioned" (3:60–61).

135. Bonhoeffer, 3:59.

Created existence intrinsically involves emergent and evolutionary processes that create tragic loss.[136] However, it is from these losses that new and more complex creatures emerge. Because of the way in which the cosmos has developed there are inherent costs to creaturely existence. However, much suffering and tragedy experienced in the world today is directly caused by the free acts of human persons, not the side effects of natural cosmological processes. It is ironic that this essential ingredient of creaturely existence, freedom, is also the human condition which can be considered the most limited throughout history.

## Choosing Freedom

The combination of the nature of divine action to empower a free and independent universe and the random occurrences resulting from chance enacts a dynamic reality constantly in flux. As is in the universe, so too in human existence. Therefore, no moment of existence can be recreated or reconstructed in exactly the same way.[137] Humanity finds its home in an environment that shifts from moment to moment. Human malleability and consciousness add yet more complexity to this existence, complicating the equation with the idiosyncrasies of each human mind. These complexities are further developed through the *imago dei* of relationality and the collective reality of socialization. At the heart of this dynamism, animating ongoing creation is a God who loves in a way that says *I free you*.

God's love empowers created existence to continually transcend itself, gently yet powerfully moving the universe toward divine purposes. In response, humanity must embrace the freedom gifted by God and cooperate with the ever-evolving cosmos not only

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136. For a good overview of cosmological creative design theory and how loss fits into divine creative action, see Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation Redemption, and Special Divine Action*, Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010).

137. Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 28.

on an individual level, but also, on a communal level. Systems of organization and meaning-making must also choose whether or not to cooperate with empowered and evolving creation. Perhaps this is the reality captured in the commonly used Catholic expression "the movement of the Spirit." It is exactly cooperation with this movement that the contemporary Catholic Church is often lacking. Admirand expresses it this way: "For a theist, when prayer and questioning are interlocked and a God of love and justice is invoked, the love of such a God stirs the search to respond to those eternal questions. It is when silence and resignation follow such losses that spiritual desolation seems to unfurl all about us."[138]

The failures of the Church in the twenty-first century, where theology and belief exist in fragments, are the things that the Church has not done, that it has not said. What is sorely needed is a new understanding of Christian discipleship, which Bonhoeffer offers, a challenge to soul-and-body-crushing political forces, which Bonhoeffer models, and a reimagined *imago dei* and relatable Christology that reignites a passion for justice and peace, as well as fortitude to act in faith. This is exactly why Bonhoeffer is a necessary dialogue partner for the Catholic Church in the U.S. today. The following (and final) sections of this chapter offers a synthesis of these crucial themes from Bonhoeffer as applied to contemporary American theological thought.

## Using Freedom for Liberation

Copeland contends that if the new anthropological focus is the individual, then the new theological focus must be marginalized and oppressed persons because they are part of a fragmented world. Taking into consideration the analogy of relationality, I take this call further to be in solidarity through the communion we share with each other. Arguing that

138. Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity*, xxi.

the turn to the subject spawned by the Enlightenment was actually the turn to the white male as subject, Copeland elucidates how Christianity has cooperated with forces of domination over time, whether through complacency, ambivalence, or willful participation.[139] As a result of this participation, Christianity became an instrument of exploitation, an accomplice to genocide, a method of enslavement. The Church's involvement with, or lack of opposition to, heinous crimes against humanity, such as the *Shoah* and the slave trade, legitimized racism and oppression, and allowed the idols of white supremacy and patriarchy to attempt to rob humanity of its dignity and self-determination. These egregious misuses of God's gift of freedom continue today. Although the manifestations of white supremacy and patriarchy are more insidious than in the twentieth century, its effects are no less damaging.

The vast disparity that exists between the upper and the lower classes in American society, mirrored all around the world and aided considerably by national and global recessions, has rendered the middle class virtually non-existent. The distance between wealth and poverty grows greater every day, fueled in no small part by the seemingly tireless force of capitalism that perpetuates corporate monopolies and rabid consumerism. Relying on systems of law enforcement and legal proceedings that are intrinsically flawed with racist intents, the so-called criminal "justice" system in our society produces hardened criminals rather than rehabilitate them.[140] This system has effectively created a new form of slavery for

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139. Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, 86–91.

140. The recent article by Hedwig Lee, "How Does Structural Racism Operate (in) the Contemporary US Criminal Justice System?," *Annual Review of Criminology* 7, no. 1 (January 2024), provide a helpful overview of the impact of structural racism in the U.S. criminal justice system. Other good introductory sources on structural racism in the U.S. criminal justice system and its history in the modern era include Angela J. Davis, ed., *Policing the Black Man: Arrest, Prosecution, and Imprisonment* (New York: Pantheon, 2017); Rose M. Brewer and Nancy A. Heitzeg, "The Racialization of Crime and Punishment: Criminal Justice, Color-Blind Racism, and the Political Economy of the

the African American population.[141] Ignorance to white privilege and systematic oppression, although it is widespread among white populations in America, is no excuse for such persecution. The fragmentation of our world is ever before us and calling out for forms of solidarity through a renewed understanding of our relationships to others.

In telling creation *I free you*, God gifts humanity with the ability to be self-determinant, free to develop in its own way. Like the biological costs that are intrinsic to the evolutionary process, there are losses which result from the existential freedom of humanity. One of these losses is the liberation of all people. Self-determination, the very core of existence as gifted by God, is negated when persons are enslaved (physically or mentally), oppressed (consciously or unconsciously), and marginalized (individually or systemically). Relationality, which is the image of God in humans is marred by these realities. This is true for the oppressed and the oppressor.

Copeland explains that members of privileged groups in society "only damage themselves" by "stunt(ing) their personal and affective and cognitive development" when they refuse to engage in open and freeing relationships with people of a different race.[142] This

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Prison Industrial Complex," *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no. 5 (January 2008); and Julian M. Rucker and Jennifer A. Richeson, "Toward an Understanding of Structural Racism: Implications for Criminal Justice," *Science* 374, no. 6565 (October 14, 2021).

141. This is the thesis of Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, rev. ed. (New York: New Press, 2012). The whole book expands on this main thesis.

142. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 14.

is not only true when applied to the "color lines" in America, but also when other groups are excluded, shunned, or persecuted because of "Church teaching."[143]

It is Jesus of Nazareth, God's own self-revelation, that calls us to oppose forces of domination, oppression and persecution; forces that cause suffering to others. Christians must open their eyes to things they have been blind to and "break bonds imposed by imperial design."[144] Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God calls for radical personal conversion. This conversion, modeled by Jesus, involves turning toward and being dedicated to the marginalized, poor, and oppressed of our world.[145] There were no forms of domination allowed in Jesus' community of followers. Rather, Jesus exemplified an expression of authority that starkly contrasts modern human concepts of authority. Jesus was a servant of the people. He washes away the dirt and grime that litters the path of discipleship[146] and surrenders his life in commitment to a human freedom exercised precisely amidst the fragmentation of our world.

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143. Copeland also rebukes the Church for producing teachings that "repel gay and lesbian" persons "to the periphery of the ecclesial body." She asserts that promoting teachings such as the Church's teaching on homosexuality "exposes us to the manipulation of agents of empire, and coaxes our collusion in opposing and punishing" lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual persons who "refuse to internalize homophobia and who live their lives without self-censorship." As Copeland warns, this treads all too closely to the negation of essential human freedom (Copeland, 76).

144. Copeland, 73.

145. For Bonhoeffer and many other twentieth-century German theologians, this was primarily Jewish people.

146. Luke 13:3–17.

Bonhoeffer extends this commitment to freedom to all biblical language, stating that according to "the language of the Bible freedom is not something that people have for themselves but something they have for others.[147] He continues:

> Freedom is not a quality a human being has, it is not an ability, a capacity, an attribute of being … it is not a quality that can be uncovered; it is not a possession, something to have, an object … instead it is a relation and nothing else. To be more precise, freedom is a relation between two persons. Being free means "being-free-for-the-other," because I am bound to the other. Only by being in relation with the other am I free.[148]

For Bonhoeffer, freedom is not individualistic. It does not apply to individual persons. Likewise, it is not a personal attribute. Freedom is an occurrence, a situation, something that comes into existence by virtue of relationship with others.[149] Bonhoeffer points out that it is humanity's misapprehensions about freedom being an individual attribute that cause them to fail at being righteous and just rulers of creation and each other. He explains that humans forget that the world is God's creation and their freedom of dominion is God-given. Humans, instead place themselves at the center of creation, forgetting that humans can only understand existence from its middle.[150]

Bonhoeffer calls humankind back to its true freedom in the *analogia relationis* by pointing out that "human freedom for God and the other person" constitutes humankind's "likeness to God."[151] Indeed, "there is no 'being-free-from' without 'being-free-for.' There is no

147. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:62.

148. Bonhoeffer, 3:62–63.

149. Bonhoeffer, 3:63.

150. Bonhoeffer, 3:67.

151. Bonhoeffer, 3:67.

dominion without serving God; in losing the one humankind necessarily loses the other."[152] The freedom that God gifts to creation with a love that says *I free you* is the basis for self-surrender. Freedom from God is freedom *for* God. Bonhoeffer puts it this way:

> it is the message of the gospel itself that God's freedom has bound itself to us, that God's free grace becomes real with us alone, that God wills not to be free for God's self but for humankind. Because God in Christ is free for humankind, because God does not keep God's freedom to God's self, we can think of freedom only as a 'being free for.'[153]

People who accept the world with its injustice, its ambiguity and brokenness, its fragments and rubble, and who accept themselves with their own idiosyncrasies, challenges and weaknesses, accept the holy mystery of a love that says *I free you*. In so doing, they embrace the self-giving and self-emptying love that God offers, allowing this love to flow through their being, liberating and fortifying their spirit. Bonhoeffer affirms this, saying

> the analogia or likeness must be understood very strictly in the sense that what is like derives its likeness *only* from the prototype,[154] so that it always points us only to the prototype itself and is 'like' it only in pointing to it in this way. *Analogia relationis* is therefore the relation which God has established, and it is analogia only in this relation which God has established. The relation of creature with creature is a relation established by God, because it consists of freedom and freedom comes from God.[155]

Bonhoeffer challenges Christians to realize that accepting God's love means sharing in that same love God has for other people, indeed for all creation. Copeland speaks of this

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152. Bonhoeffer, 3:67. De Gruchy affirms that *Creation and Fall* emphasizes "human freedom in relation the freedom of God. Human beings have been given the freedom to rule over the created order but must do so responsibly. Genuine human freedom is freedom 'for others,' just as God's freedom expresses itself in covenantal love for the world." He also points out that this anticipates Bonhoeffer's future writings in *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* writings, and his " 'ethic of free responsibility,' which provided the theological basis for his participation in the Resistance" (11).

153. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:63.

154. The prototype is Jesus Christ.

155. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, DBWE 3:65–66.

love when referring to a passage from Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* in which one of the characters tells others to "love each other into wholeness."[156] The character also encourages others to love their own hearts, for it is in loving one's own heart that the full possibilities and power of life and freedom are born.[157] Only this kind of love, a love that says *I free you* to one's own heart, can free individuals from the isolation and anxiety of postmodern existence. Only a love that says *I free you* to God's indwelling spirit can truly liberate the human spirit and mind to serve God's divine purposes. Only a love that says *I free you* to all of creation can overcome the powers of selfish greed and domination that currently rein the world, for the incarnate spirit of God that exists in communion with creation "refuses to be bound."[158]

As the symbol of the incarnate Christ in the world, the Church must take up the motto of a love that says *I free you*. This is the call to which the Catholic Church must respond if it seeks to reach the hearts and minds of believers with prophetic witness to Christian truth and historical consciousness. The Church must offer a love that says *I free you* to all; to the priest and the sinner, the president and the poor man, the prophet and the ridiculer, the oppressor and the marginalized, the master and the slave. As Copeland asserts, "we need thoroughgoing, practical, genuine systematic change in the present global order."[159] As the symbol of Christ's mission in the world and as the pillar of the Christian prophetic

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156. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 52, from a lengthy interaction Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved* (New York: Knopf), 88.

157. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 52.

158. Copeland, 45.

159. Copeland, 93.

tradition, the Catholic Church must be the voice that calls creation to transformation and self-transcendence.

Copeland points out that "Jesus invites all who would follow him to abandon loyalties of class and station, family and kin, culture and nation in order to form God's people anew and, thus, to contest empire."[160] However, she warns that in modeling this life, Jesus also unveiled the consequences of acting with integrity by living in freedom and in love with others.[161]

The path of discipleship in solidarity is a hard one to follow, yet, as Copeland asserts, "only in and through solidarity with … the very least of the world, shall humanity come to fruition."[162] These sentiments closely connect to arguments that Dietrich Bonhoeffer made throughout his life, a life cut short when he was executed in a Nazi prison camp. Bonhoeffer was sentenced to death for placing himself (in conjunction with several other German Christians in the Confessing Church community) in between the Jewish people and the racist and oppressive National Socialism Party that sought to systemically exterminate all Jews.

As has been repeatedly argued through this dissertation, Bonhoeffer's legacy contains a wealth of resources for dialogue, sustenance and fortification for contemporary social, political, and ideological challenges facing the Church. David Burrel invoked a similar message when discussing Peter Admirand's method of sharing narratives of those who survived mass atrocities. He says that hearing these narratives

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160. Copeland, 62.

161. Copeland, 81.

162. Copeland, 92.

> complicates one's moral horizon where the line separating the 'good' from the 'bad' is often inaccurate or blurry. For a theodicy still to be considered meaningful and relevant, however, it must immerse itself within this conflicting, often ambiguous world where suffering and horrific tragedy may strike without warning or reason and where individuals will risk everything to save a stranger or to implement policies to murder an entire people. This work aims to develop a viable theodicy position that is formed through such an immersion.[163]

This is exactly what Bonhoeffer did with his theology and his life, and this is exactly what a constructive theology of fragmentation proposes be done in contrast to many Catholic theologies, especially in the U.S. context, that seek to adhere to a more "traditional" or "orthodox" *analogia entis* in order to defend the classic Christian vision of a sovereign God. Unfortunately, this vision actually neglects both the realities of a fragmented world and the ways in which the *analogia relationis* speaks meaningfully to that fragmentation, as this dissertation has explained. Thus, as systematic theologies resist becoming theologies of fragmentation, they resist the contemporary call of Christ revealed in atrocity and brokenness and born witness to by Bonhoeffer's embrace of fragmentation and ambiguity in conformation to Christ.

## Conclusion

The analogy of relationality that Bonhoeffer articulates offers a fitting response to the ontological reality of fragmentation and ambiguity and the fragmentation of theology in the twentieth century. This also offers theology an opportunity to dialogue closely with and reexamine more traditional, orthodox models of *analogia entis* which have been historically useful for declaring God's sovereignty (and through analogy, human power too). Bonhoeffer's work and life are a testament to another way of thinking about the analogy, and about the fragmentation and ambiguity of our world. Bonhoeffer teaches us, through conformation to

163. Admirand, *Amidst Mass Atrocity*, xxv.

Christ, to embrace these realities and to harness them in solidarity with others, particularly with the marginalized and oppressed, in order to heal bodily and worldly brokenness and take action toward justice.

As reviewed at the beginning of this dissertation in chapter 1, Catholic theologians who read Bonhoeffer out of context miss out on how his very life embodied the fragmentary, and the fragmented theological methodology he utilizes. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer thought that theology should go in this direction, toward a theology of fragmentation. As this dissertation has demonstrated, this stands in stark contrast to these traditional Catholic theologians, especially in the U.S., who want to use Bonhoeffer's thought in order to defend conventional theological claims established through the conventional *analogia entis* and the sovereign God it constructs.

The Catholic community in the U.S. is ripe for Bonhoeffer's relational and constructive theology of fragmentation due to the political and religious ideological polarization that has impacted Catholics in the U.S. in recent decades.[164] Catholic theology would do well to comprehend these signs of the times as warning signs. The looming risk that humanity may repeat the tragic history of Nazi Germany and other atrocities from the twentieth century is evident from the parallels that can be drawn between these societal trends and events in the U.S. today and the emergence of totalitarian, fascist and genocidal regimes in the recent past.[165]

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164. More recently these realities can be attested to by the 2016 election of Donald Trump to the presidency, the emergence of protest movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, and the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capital.

165. For just one example, one might ask how much difference there is between U.S. officials separating families (including taking children away from their parents) and herding mass amounts of people into detention centers at the U.S.-Mexico border and the mass incarceration

This dissertation has attempted to offer direction for a contemporary Catholic theology that is both grounded in its rich intellectual tradition and open to the realities of postmodern life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theological ethics evidences a theology that can withstand nefarious political forces and sustain resistance to such forces. This is obvious not only from Bonhoeffer's formal published works, but also his informal writings and the record of his life, challenges, and fateful decisions. A close examination and appropriation of Bonhoeffers core incarnational Christology, his embrace of contextual ambiguity, and his definition of discipleship as conformation to Christ all offer powerful resources to Catholics in the U.S. today in the ever-present battle against systemic oppression and ungodly desecration of human dignity.

Amidst the collapse of the major Christian systems as a result of their inability to address evil and suffering on a global level, Bonhoeffer articulates a compelling theological anthropology of *analogia relationis* that dialogues well with twenty-first-century Catholic theologians and the greater attention being paid to the ambiguity and fragmented nature of human existence in postmodern theories. Here, Bonhoeffer exemplifies a theology

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of Jews in Europe that initiated the genocidal atrocities of the Holocaust. Another more obvious parallel can be seen in the stark and startling commonalities between the rhetoric of the political campaign "Make America Great Again," which only thinly veils a vicious nationalism grounded in white supremacy, and the rhetoric employed by the Nazi regime promising to restore the idyll of the *völkischegemeinschaft* (people's community). For more about the parallels between the U.S. today and Nazi Germany, see Paul Lakeland, "Spiritual Resistance: Theology in the Age of Neoliberalism," *Commonweal* 147, no. 6 (June 2020): 24–29 (and online); Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization," *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (December 2006): 690–714; and David Sharp "Hijacked Christianity: How an Aberrant Eschatology Enables a Grievance Culture that Supplants Christian Grace for an Extremist Meritocracy" (master's thesis, Georgia State University, 2022). For an international take on the situation of neoliberalism, a good source is Damon Silvers' lecture series, "Neoliberalism as a Global System: Private Power and Public Weakness" (presented at the University College London Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, London, UK, April 2023).

that uncovers relevant understandings of God by leaning into this ambiguity and sifting through the fragments, proving that both are windows into the true nature of God. This dissertation has attempted to develop a similar approach through a constructive theology of fragmentation.

This dissertation has attempted to honor the fragmentary nature of humans themselves, for, in a way, humans are themselves fragments of God; tiny pieces of an immense reality beyond all comprehension except deep within our existence where a fragment of God's nature (*analogia relationis*) dwells. Wholeness belongs to God alone, but as this dissertation has proposed, it is in the journey back to Wholeness that we discover the true meaning of freedom. Ultimately, it is our choices and our actions that determine whether we each remain simply fragments of a larger reality, or if we continually move toward one another to build something new, however incomplete that something new may be. And no one expressed this more effectively than Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

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# VITA

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# COLOPHON

This dissertation was typeset using Adobe Indesign. It uses the font Aldus Nova Pro, a modern digitizaton of the Aldus, which was designed by the famous German typographer Herman Zaph (1918–2015). Zaph designed  Aldus in 1948 as a companion to his better known font Palatino. Both typefaces are among the most important and influential twentieth-century revivals of classic renaissance letter forms. Zaph drew Palatino as a display font for use at large text sizes and Aldus for use as body text in books. Aldus was chosen for this dissertation because it was used extensively in post-World War II German editions of Bonhoeffer's works. Before World War II, as was typical of the time, Bonhoeffer's works were printed using Fraktur, a Blackletter typeface that fell out of favor in Germany after the war and which is obviously unsuitable for a dissertation.