Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology

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The Fragments That Were Bonhoeffer's Life and Work

> The primary confession of the Christian before the world is the deed which interprets itself. If the deed is to have become a force, then the world itself will long to confess the Word. This is not the same as loudly shrieking out propaganda. This Word must be preserved as the most sacred possession of the community. This is a matter between God and the community, not between the community and the world. It is the Word of recognition between friends, not a word to use against enemies. This attitude was first learned at baptism. The deed alone is our confession of faith before the world.[1]

So wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1932 just before the German Church's struggle with Hitler began. This may seem an odd passage to begin an essay on Bonhoeffer's political theology, but it is so only if one assumes a distinction can be made between Bonhoeffer's theology, at least his early theology found in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, and his later involvement with the *Abwehr* [Military Intelligence Department] plot against Hitler. Indeed, it will be the burden of my account of Bonhoeffer's life and theology to show that from the very beginning Bonhoeffer was attempting to develop a theological politics from which we still have much to learn.[2] He may have even regarded *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* as his "academic theology," which no doubt they were, but I will argue that the theological position he took in those books made the subsequent politics of his life and work inevitable.

Anyone who has read Eberhard Bethge's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* knows it is impossible to distinguish between Bonhoeffer's life and work.[3] Marilynne Robinson uses the passage above to challenge those who think the consistency and significance of Bonhoeffer's theology is given a prominence it might not have due to his courageous political activity and death.[4] It is no doubt true that Bonhoeffer's fame as well as his theological

significance were attributed to his unfinished *Ethics* and his *Letters and Papers From Prison*. Many, quite understandably, interpreted some of Bonhoeffer's own remarks in his prison correspondence to suggest his political opposition to the Nazis had occasioned a fundamental shift in his theology.[5] I will try to show, however, that Bonhoeffer's work from beginning to end was the attempt to reclaim the visibility of the church as the necessary condition for the proclamation of the gospel in a world that no longer privileged Christianity. That he was hanged by the personal order of Heinrich Himmler on April 9, 1945 at Flossenbürg Concentration Camp means he has now become for those who come after him part of God's visibility.

I am aware that some people reading my account of Bonhoeffer and, in particular, my emphasis on his ecclesiology for rightly interpreting his life and work, will suspect my account sounds far too much like positions that have become associated with my own work. I have no reason to deny that to be the case, but if it is true it is only because I first learned what I think from reading Bonhoeffer (and Barth). This is the first essay I have ever written on Bonhoeffer, but it is certainly not the first time I have read him. I am sure Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship*, which I read as a student in seminary, was the reason some years later John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* had such a profound influence on me.[6] Both books convinced me that Christology cannot be abstracted from accounts of discipleship or, put more systematically, we must say, as Bonhoeffer says in *Sanctorum Communio*, "the church of Jesus Christ that is actualized by the Holy Spirit is really the church here and now."[7] The reason I have not written on Bonhoeffer has to do with the reception of his work when it was translated into English. The first book by Bonhoeffer usually read by English readers was *Letters and Papers from Prison*. As a result he was hailed as champion of the "death of God" movement and/or one of the first to anticipate the Christian celebration of the "secular city."[8] On the basis of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, Joseph Fletcher went so far as to claim him as an advocate of situation ethics.[9] As a result I simply decided not to claim Bonhoeffer in support of the position I was trying to develop, though in fact he was one of my most important teachers. That I write now about Bonhoeffer is my way of trying to acknowledge a debt long overdue.

One other difficulty stood in the way of my acknowledging the significance of Bonhoeffer for my work: his decision to participate in the plot

to kill Hitler seemed to make him an unlikely candidate to support a pacifist position. How to understand Bonhoeffer's involvement with the conspiracy associated with Admiral Canaris and Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, I think can never be determined with certainty. Bonhoeffer gratefully accepted von Dohnanyi's offer to become a member of the *Abwehr* because it gave him the means to avoid conscription and the dreaded necessity to take the oath of loyalty to Hitler. There is no doubt Bonhoeffer knew the conspiracy involved an attempt to kill Hitler. In spite of his complete lack of knowledge of guns or bombs he offered to be the one to assassinate Hitler. Yet the secrecy required by the conspiracy means we do not have available any texts that could help us know how Bonhoeffer understood how this part of his life fit, or did not fit, with his theological convictions or his earlier commitment to pacifism.[10]

That we cannot know how he understood his participation in the attempt to kill Hitler and thus how his whole life "makes sense" is not a peculiarity Bonhoeffer would think unique to his life. The primary confession of the Christian may be the deed which interprets itself, but according to Bonhoeffer our lives cannot be seen as such a deed. Only "Jesus' testimony to himself stands by itself, self-authenticating."[11] In contrast, our lives, no matter how earnestly or faithfully lived, can be no more than fragments. In a letter to Bethge in 1944 Bonhoeffer wrote:

> The important thing today is that we should be able to discern from the fragments 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 (even a decent "hell" is too good for them), and others whose importance lasts for centuries, because their completion can only be a matter for God, and so they are fragments and must be fragments — I'm thinking, e.g. of the *Art of Fugue*. 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. I

> can never get away from Jeremiah 45. Do you still remember that Saturday evening in Finkenwalde when I expounded it? Here, too, is a necessary fragment of life — "but I will you your life as a prize of war."[12]

However, thanks to Bethge's great biography, we know the main outlines of Bonhoeffer's life. Bethge's work makes it impossible to treat Bonhoeffer's theology apart from his life. Therefore I must give some brief overview of his life, highlighting those aspects of it that suggest his passion for the church. Yet I must be careful not to make Bonhoeffer's life appear too singular. In a letter to Bethge in 1944, Bonhoeffer observed that there is always a danger that intense and erotic love may destroy what he calls "the polyphony of life." He continues, "what I mean is that God wants us to love him eternally with our whole hearts — not in such a way as to injure or weaken our earthly love, but to provide a kind of *cantus firmus* to which the other melodies of life provide the counterpoint."[13] Bonhoeffer's life was a polyphony which his commitment to the church only enriched.

It is not clear where Bonhoeffer's passion for God and God's church came from. In a wonderful letter to Bethge in 1942 he confesses that "my resistance against everything 'religious' grows. Often it amounts to an instinctive revulsion, which is certainly not good. I am not religious by nature. But I have to think continually of God and Christ; authenticity, life, freedom, and compassion mean a great deal to me. It is just their religious manifestations which are so unattractive."[14] Prison only served to confirm his views about religion. He writes to Bethge in 1943, "Don't worry, I shan't come out of here a *homo religiosus*! On the contrary, my suspicion and horror of religiosity are greater than ever."[15]

The source of Bonhoeffer's faith is even more mysterious, given his family background. He and his twin sister Sabine were born on February 4, 1906. His father, Karl Bonhoeffer, was from a distinguished German family as was his mother, Paula von Hase. The Bonhoeffers had five children, three boys and two girls, before Dietrich and his sister were born. One daughter was born after Dietrich and Sabine. Bonhoeffer's father was the leading psychiatrist in Germany, holding a chair at the University of Berlin. He was not openly hostile to Christianity; he allowed his wife to use familiar Christian celebrations as family events. In Bonhoeffer's family Christianity simply seems to have

been part of the furniture upper-class Germans assumed came with their privileges.

Bonhoeffer's bearing and personality were undoubtedly shaped by his class. He took full advantage of the cultural and academic resources available to him. He became a talented pianist, and music was a well-spring from which he drew support in the darkest times of his life. That he existed in such a culturally rich family is one reason no one could understand his quite early decision to be a theologian. There had been theologians on both sides of his family, but given the opportunities before him it was not clear why of all the paths he might have taken he decided to be a theologian.

Yet at seventeen Bonhoeffer began his theological studies at Tübingen. Tübingen was but preparation for his coming back to Berlin to study with the great Protestant liberals — Adolf von Harnack, R. Seeberg, and Karl Holl. Soon recognized as someone with extraordinary intellectual power, he completed his first dissertation under Seeberg's direction, *Sanctorum Communio* in 1927. In spite of being at the center of Protestant liberalism, Bonhoeffer had come under the influence of Karl Barth. In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer displayed the creative synthesis that would mark all his subsequent work — i.e., the firm conviction that Christian theology must insist that "only the concept of revelation can lead to the Christian concept of the church," coupled with the Lutheran stress on the absolute necessity that the same church known by revelation is also the concrete historical community that in spite of all its imperfections and modest appearances "is the body of Christ, Christ's presence on earth."[16]

Bonhoeffer was now on the path to becoming the paradigmatic German academic theologian. However, for some reason he felt drawn to the ministry and took the examinations necessary to be ordained and appointed to a church. His family continued to assume Bonhoeffer would ultimately become an academic, but he thought his problem "was not how to enter the academic world, it was how to escape it."[17] Yet he returned to Berlin, finishing his second dissertation, *Act and Being*, in 1930. In it he develops the Barthian insistence that God's being is act, but he worries that though Barth readily uses "temporal categories (instant, not beforehand, afterward, etc.), his concept of act still should not be regarded as temporal."[18]

Before assuming the position of lecturer at the University of Berlin,

Bonhoeffer spent a year at Union Seminary in New York. He was not the least attracted to American theology, finding it superficial, but he was drawn deeply to the life of the African-American church. Almost every Sunday Bonhoeffer accompanied his African-American friend, Frank Fisher, to the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem.[19] Though Bonhoeffer's characterization of the American church as "Protestantism without Reformation" is often quoted, more important for our understanding Bonhoeffer is his observation that the fundamental characteristic of American thought is that "[Americans] do not see the radical claim of truth on the shaping of their lives. Community is therefore founded less on truth than on the spirit of 'fairness'."[20] According to Bonhoeffer the result is "a certain levelling" in intellectual demands and accomplishments.

That truth mattered so deeply for Bonhoeffer may account for an extraordinary letter he wrote to a friend in 1936. The letter begins, "Then something happened." He does not say what happened but he does say it transformed his life. Before "something happened," he confesses he plunged into work in a very unchristian way, but then for the first time "I discovered the Bible . . . I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the church, spoken and preached about it — but I had not yet become a Christian."[21] Bonhoeffer continues, confessing he had turned the doctrine of Jesus Christ into something of a personal advantage for himself, but the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount, freed him from his self-preoccupation. It became clear that "the life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the church, and step by step it became clearer to me how far that must go. Then came the crisis of 1933. This strengthened me in it. The revival of the church and of the ministry became my supreme concern."[22]

This letter is remarkable not only because of what it tells us about Bonhoeffer, but because it indicates this change is also linked with his becoming a pacifist. "I suddenly saw the Christian pacifism that I had recently passionately opposed to be self-evident."[23] No doubt coming into contact with Jean Lasserre at Union accounts for Bonhoeffer at least becoming sympathetic to pacifism, but equally important was Bonhoeffer's passion for the truth. In an address to the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia in 1932, he says,

> There can only be a community of peace when it does not rest on *lies* and *injustice*. There is a community of peace for Christians

> only because one will forgive the other for his sins. The forgiveness of sins still remains the sole ground of all peace, even where the order of external peace remains preserved in truth and justice. It is therefore also the ultimate ground on which all ecumenical work rests, precisely where the cleavage appears hopeless.[24]

Bonhoeffer's life becomes an unfolding of his complete commitment to the church. Until he joined the *Abwehr*, his opposition to the Nazis would be fought through the church in and, perhaps as important, outside Germany. In 1933 he was appointed as pastor to the German Church in London in hopes that such an appointment would allow him to make contacts in order to help the world understand the danger the Nazis represented. That danger he took to be nothing less than the "brutal attempt to make history without God and to found it on the strength of man alone."[25] While in England Bonhoeffer developed a close and lasting friendship with George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, who worked tirelessly on Bonhoeffer's behalf.

Before leaving Germany, Bonhoeffer with Martin Niemöller had drafted the *Bethel Confession* for the Pastors' Emergency League, which in the strongest language possible challenged the anti-semitism of the German Church. The *Bethel Confession* and the *Barmen Declaration* became the crucial documents that gave Bonhoeffer hope that the church of Jesus Christ not only existed but was sufficient to provide resistance to the Nazis. He could, therefore, declare in 1936 that "the government of the national church has cut itself off from the Christian church. The Confessing Church is the true church of Jesus Christ in Germany."[26] He was unafraid to draw the implication — "The question of church membership is the question of salvation. The boundaries of the church are the boundaries of salvation. Whoever knowingly cuts himself off from the Confessing Church in Germany cuts himself off from salvation."[27]

Bonhoeffer returned to Germany in 1935 in answer to a call from the Confessing Church to direct a preacher's seminary at Finkenwalde. His passion for Christian community seems to have found its most intense expression there. During his time there he not only finished *Discipleship* but also his extraordinary account of Christian community, *Life Together*.[28]

At Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer not only encouraged seminarians to confess their sins to another member of the community, but he established with a core group the "House of Brethren" committed to leading "a communal life in daily

and strict obedience to the will of Christ Jesus, in the exercise of the humblest and highest service one Christian can perform for another." Its members "must learn to recognize the strength and liberation to be found in service to one another and communal life in a Christian community. . . . They have to learn to serve the truth alone in the study of the Bible and its interpretation in their sermons and teaching."[29]

During his time at Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer continued to be engaged in the ecumenical movement and the work of the Confessing Church. Developments in the latter could not help but be a continuing disappointment to him. No doubt equally troubling was the conscription and death of many of the students he taught at Finkenwalde. Finally in 1940 the Gestapo closed the seminary, which meant Bonhoeffer was without an ecclesial appointment. He was now vulnerable to conscription. Because of his international connections, Von Dohnanyi justified Bonhoeffer's appointment to the *Abwehr* on grounds that through his ecumenical connections he could discover valuable information for the Reich. In effect Bonhoeffer became a double agent, often making trips to Switzerland and Sweden to meet Bell and other ecumenical representatives in the hope that Bell could convince the Allies to state their war aims in a manner that would not make it more difficult for those committed to Hitler's overthrow.

Without a church connection Bonhoeffer turned again to his passion for theology, beginning work on what we now know as his *Ethics*. Much of it was written at the Benedictine monastery at Ettal which served as his retreat from the world. But Bonhoeffer knew no retreat was possible, and he was finally arrested for "subversion of the armed forces" on April 5, 1943. Imprisoned in Tegel prison, he was under interrogation in preparation for being tried. There he wrote most of the material for *Letters and Papers from Prison*. On July 20, 1944, von Stauffenberg's attempt on Hitler's life failed with the subsequent discovery of Canaris's files in the Zossen bunker. Those files clearly implicated Bonhoeffer and von Dohnanyi in the conspiracy. Bonhoeffer was moved to Buchenwald and finally to Flossenbürg, where he was hanged on April 9. His fellow prisoners and guards testify that throughout his imprisonment he not only functioned as their pastor but died as he had lived.

Bonhoeffer's life that was at once theological and political. It was so,

however, not because he died at the hands of the Nazis. His life and work would have been political if the Nazis had never existed; for he saw that the failure of the church when confronted with Hitler began long before the Nazi challenge. Hitler forced a church long accustomed to privileges dependent on its invisibility to become visible. The church in Germany, however, had simply lost the resources to reclaim its space in the world. How that space can be reclaimed — not only in the face of the Nazis but when time seems "normal" — is the heart of Bonhoeffer's theological politics.

Bonhoeffer's Recovery of the Church's Political Significance

In an essay entitled "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," John Howard Yoder makes the striking observation that after the Constantinian shift the meaning of the word "Christian" changes. Prior to Constantine it took exceptional conviction to be a Christian. After Constantine it takes exceptional courage *not* to be counted as a Christian. This development, according to Yoder, called forth a new doctrinal development, "namely the doctrine of the invisibility of the church." Before Constantine, one knew as a fact of everyday experience that there was a church, but one had to have faith that God was governing history. After Constantine, people assumed as a fact God was governing history through the emperor, but one had to take it on faith that within the nominally Christian mass there was a community of true believers. No longer could being a Christian be identified with church membership, since many "Christians" in the church had not chosen to follow Christ. Now to be a Christian is transmuted to "inwardness."[30]

Bonhoeffer is obviously a Lutheran and Lutherans are seldom confused with Anabaptists, but his account of the challenge facing the church closely parallels Yoder's account.[31] For example, in notes for a lecture at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer observes that the consequence of Luther's doctrine of grace is that the church should live in the world and, according to Romans l3, in its ordinances. "Thus in his own way Luther confirms Constantine's covenant with the church. As a result, a minimal ethic prevailed. Luther of course wanted a complete ethic for everyone, not only for monastic orders. Thus the existence of the Christian became the existence of the citizen. The nature of the church vanished into the invisible realm. But in this way the New Testament message was fundamentally misunderstood, inner-worldliness became a

principle."[32]

Faced with this result Bonhoeffer argues that the church must define its limits by severing heresy from its body. "It has to make itself distinct and to be a community which hears the Apocalypse. It has to testify to its alien nature and to resist the false principle of inner-worldliness. Friendship between the church and the world is not normal, but abnormal. The community *must* suffer like Christ, without wonderment. The cross stands *visibly* over the community."[33] It is not hard to see how Bonhoeffer's stress on the necessity of visibility led him to write a book like *Discipleship*. Holiness but names God's way of making his will for his people visible. "To flee into invisibility is to deny the call. Any community of Jesus which wants to be invisible is no longer a community that follows him."[34]

According to Bonhoeffer sanctification, properly understood, is the church's politics. For sanctification is only possible within the visible church community. "That is the 'political' character of the church community. A merely personal sanctification which seeks to bypass this openly visible separation of the church-community from the world confuses the pious desires of the religious flesh with the sanctification of the church-community, which has been accomplished in Christ's death and is being actualized by the seal of God. . . . Sanctification through the seal of the Holy Spirit always places the church in the midst of struggle."[35] Bonhoeffer saw that the holiness of the church is necessary for the redemption of the world.[36]

I am not suggesting that when Bonhoeffer wrote *Sanctorum Communio*, he did so with the clarity that can be found in the lectures he gave at Finkenwalde or in his *Discipleship*. In *Sanctorum Communio* his concerns may be described as more strictly theological, but even that early the "strictly theological" was against the background of Protestant liberal mistakes, and in particular Ernst Troeltsch, that made inevitable his unease with the stance of the German churches toward the world. According to Bonhoeffer, "The church is God's new will and purpose for humanity. God's will is always directed toward the concrete, historical human being. But this means that it begins to be implemented *in history*. God's will must become visible and comprehensible at some point in history."[37]

Throughout his work Bonhoeffer relentlessly explores and searches for what it means for the church to faithfully manifest God's visibility. For example,

in his *Ethics*, he notes that the church occupies a space in the world through her public worship, her parish life, and her organization. That the church takes up space is but a correlative to the proposition that God in Jesus Christ occupies space in the world. "And so, too, the Church of Jesus Christ is the place, in other words the space in the world, at which the reign of Jesus Christ over the whole world is evidenced and proclaimed."[38] Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is the expression of his Christology in which the reality of Christ determines all that is.

For Bonhoeffer it is in Jesus Christ that the whole of reality is taken up, that reality has an origin and an end. For that reason it is only in Him, and with Him as the point of departure, that there can be an action which is in accordance with reality. The origin of action which accords with reality is not the pseudo-Lutheran Christ who exists solely for the purpose of sanctioning the facts as they are, nor the Christ of radical enthusiasm whose function is to bless every revolution, but it is the incarnate God Jesus who has accepted man and who has loved, condemned, and reconciled man and with him the world.[39]

As Christ was in the world, so the Church is in the world. These are not pious sentiments, but reality making claims that challenge the way things are. They are the very heart of Bonhoeffer's theological politics, a politics that requires the church to be the church in order that the world can be the world. Bonhoeffer's call for the world to be the world is the outworking of his Christology and ecclesiology. For the church to let the world be the world means the church refuses to live by privileges granted on the world's terms. "Real secularity consists in the church's being able to renounce all privileges and all its property but never Christ's Word and the forgiveness of sins. With Christ and the forgiveness of sins to fall back on, the church is free to give up everything else."[40] Such freedom, moreover, is the necessary condition for the church to be the zone of truth in a world of mendacity.[41]

Sanctorum Communio was Bonhoeffer's attempt to develop a "specifically Christian sociology" as an alternative to Troeltsch.[42] Bonhoeffer argues that the very categories — church/sect/mysticism, Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft — must be rejected if the visibility of the church is to be reclaimed. Troeltsch confuses questions of origins with essences, with the result that the gospel is subjected to the world. The very choice between voluntary association and compulsory organization is rendered unacceptable by the "Protestant understanding of the Spirit and the church-community, in the former because

it does not take the reality of the Spirit into account at all, and in the latter in that it severs the essential relation between Spirit and church-community, thereby completely losing any sociological interest."[43]

From Bonhoeffer's perspective Troeltsch is just one of the most powerful representatives of the Protestant liberal presumption that the gospel is purely religious, encompassing the outlook of the individual, but indifferent and unconcerned with worldly institutions.[44] The sociology of Protestant liberalism, therefore, is simply the other side of liberal separation of Jesus from the Christ. Protestant liberalism continues the docetic Christological heresy that results in an equally pernicious docetic ecclesiology.[45] Protestant liberalism is the theological expression of the sociology of the invisible church that "conceded to the world the right to determine Christ's place in the world; in the conflict between the church and the world it accepted the comparatively easy terms of peace that the world dictated. Its strength was that it did not try to put the clock back, and that it genuinely accepted the battle (Troeltsch), even though this ended with its defeat."[46]

Bonhoeffer's work was to provide a complete alternative to the liberal Protestant attempt to make peace with the world. In a lecture at the beginning of his Finkenwalde period concerning the interpretation of scripture, Bonhoeffer asserts that the intention "should be not to justify Christianity in this present age, but *to justify the present age before the Christian message*."[47] Bonhoeffer's attack in *Letters and Papers from Prison* on the liberal Protestant apologetics that tries to secure "faith" on the edges of life and the despair such edges allegedly create is a continuation of his attack on Protestant pietism and his refusal to let the proclamation of the Gospel be marginalized. For the same reasons he had little regard for existentialist philosophers or psychotherapists, whom he regarded as exponents of a secularized methodism.[48]

Unfortunately, Bonhoeffer's suggestion about Barth's "positivism of revelation" and the correlative need for a nonreligious interpretation of theological concepts has led some to think Bonhoeffer wanted Christians to become "secular."[49] The exact opposite is the case. Bonhoeffer insists that if reality is redeemed by Christ, Christians must claim the center, refusing to use the "world's" weakness to make the Gospel intelligible. He refuses all strategies that try "to make room for God on the borders" thinking it better to leave certain problems unsolved. The Gospel is not an answer to questions produced

by human anxiety but a proclamation of a "fact." Thus Bonhoeffer's wonderful remark: "Belief in the Resurrection is not the solution to the problem of death. God's 'beyond' is not the beyond of our cognitive faculties. The transcendence of epistemological theory has nothing to do with the transcendence of God. God is beyond in the midst of life. The church stands, not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village."[50]

Bonhoeffer's call for a Christian worldliness, moreover, is not his turning away from the kind of community discipline he so eloquently defended in *Discipleship* and *Life Together*. In his confession in *Letters and Papers from Prison* that at one time he mistakenly assumed he could acquire faith by living a holy life, he is not rejecting the form of life lived at Finkenwalde. When he says he now sees some of the dangers of *Discipleship*, though he still stands by that book, he is continuing to reject the false dualism inherited from Troeltsch. Rather, he is making the Christological point that the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection must be held in unity to rightly understand the church's relationship to the world. An emphasis on incarnation too often leads to compromise; an ethic based on cross and resurrection too often leads to radicalism and enthusiasm.[51] The church names that community that lives in radical hope in a world without hope. To so live means the church cannot help but be different from the world. Such a difference is not an end in itself but "automatically follow[s] from an authentic proclamation of the gospel."[52]

This I believe to be Bonhoeffer's theological politics. He sought to recover the visibility of the church because "it is essential to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that it occupies space within the world."[53] Put positively, in Jesus Christ God has occupied space in the world and continues to do so through the work of the Holy Spirit's calling the church to faithfulness. These were the convictions that Bonhoeffer brought to his war with the Nazis and that made him the most insightful and powerful force shaping the church's witness against Hitler. Yet in a sense Hitler was exactly the kind of enemy that makes Bonhoeffer's (and Barth's) theological politics so compelling. The question remains, however, whether Bonhoeffer (or Barth) provides an adequate account of how the church must negotiate a world "after Christendom." To consider that question, I must explore what might be called Bonhoeffer's "political ethics," which are expressed primarily by his critique and attempt to find an alternative to the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms.

Bonhoeffer's Search for a Political Ethic

At a conference sponsored by the Church Federation Office in 1932, Bonhoeffer (even though he was the youngest speaker at the conference) vigorously attacked the idea of the "orders of creation" introduced by traditional Lutherans. That he would reject the two-kingdom tradition was inevitable, given the direction he had begun in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. Creation simply cannot be self-validating because Christians have no knowledge of creation separate from redemption. "The creation is a picture of the power and faithfulness of God, demonstrated to us in God's revelation in Jesus Christ. We worship the creator, revealed to us as redeemer."[54] Whatever Christians have to say about worldly order, it will have to be said on the presumption that Christ is the reality of all that is.

Bonhoeffer soon returned to the issue of the "orders of creation" in a address to the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia in July 1932. Again he attacks those who believe that we must accept certain orders as given in creation. Such a view entails the presumption that because the nations have been created differently each one is obliged to preserve and develop its own characteristics. He notes this understanding of the nation is particularly dangerous because "just about everything can be defended by it." Not only is the fallenness of such order ignored, but those that use the orders of creation to justify their commitment to Germany fail to see that "the so-called orders of creation are no longer *per se* revelations of the divine commandment, they are concealed and invisible. Thus the concept of orders of creation must be rejected as a basis for the knowledge of the commandment of God."[55]

However, if the orders of creation are rejected, then Bonhoeffer must provide some account of how Christians understand the commandment of God for their lives. In *Creation and Fall* he notes that the Creator does not turn from the fallen world but rather deals with humankind in a distinctive way: "He made them cloaks." Accordingly, the created world becomes the preserved world by which God restrains our distorted passions. Rather than speaking of the orders of creation, Bonhoeffer begins to describe God's care of our lives as the orders of preservation.[56] The orders of preservation are not self-validating, but "obtain their value wholly from outside themselves, from Christ, from the new creation."[57] Any order of the world can, therefore, be dissolved if it prevents our hearing the commandment of Christ.

What difference for concrete ethical reflection flows from changing the name from "creation" to "preservation"? Bonhoeffer is obviously struggling to challenge how the Lutheran "two order" account both fails to be Christological and serves as a legitimation of the status quo. In *Christ the Center*, lectures in Christology he delivered at Berlin in 1933, Bonhoeffer spelled out some implications of his Christological display of the orders of preservation. For example, he observed that since Christ is present in the church after the cross and resurrection, the church must be understood as the center of history. In fact, the state has only existed in its proper from only so long as there has been a church, because the state has its proper origin with the cross. Yet the history of which the church is the center is a history made by the state. Accordingly, the visibility of the church does not require that the church must be acknowledged by the state by being made a state church, but rather the church is the "hidden meaning and promise of the state."[58]

But if the church is the state's "hidden meaning," how can the state know that the church is so, if the church is not visible to the state? How is this "hiddenness" of the church for the state congruent with Bonhoeffer's insistence on the church's visibility? Bonhoeffer wants the boundaries of the church to challenge or at least limit the boundaries of the state, but he finds it hard to break Lutheran habits that determine what the proper role of the state is in principle. Thus he will say that the kingdom of God takes form in the state insofar as the state holds itself responsible for stopping the world from flying to pieces through the exercise of its authority; or, that the power of loneliness in the church is destroyed in the confession-occurrence, but "in the state it is restrained through the preservation of community order."[59] Understandably, Bonhoeffer does not realize that he is not obliged to provide an account in principle of what the state is or should be.

In his *Ethics* Bonhoeffer seems to have abandoned the language of "orders of preservation" and instead uses the language of "mandates."[60] For Bonhoeffer, the Scriptures name four mandates — labor, marriage, government, and the church.[61] The mandates receive their intelligibility only as they are created in and directed towards Christ. Accordingly, the authorization to speak on behalf of the Church, the family, labor, and government is conferred from above and then "only so long as they do not encroach upon each other's domains and only so long as they give effect to God's commandment in

conjunction and collaboration with one another and each in its own way."[62] Bonhoeffer does not develop how we would know when one domain has encroached on the other or what conjunction or collaboration might look like.[63]

It is clear what Bonhoeffer is against, but it is not yet clear what he is for. He is against the distinction between "person" and "office" he attributes to the Reformation. He notes this distinction is crucial for justifying the Reformation position on war and on the public use of legal means to repel evil. "But this distinction between private person and bearer of an office as normative for my behavior is foreign to Jesus," Bonhoeffer argues. "He does not say a word about it. He addresses his disciples as people who have left everything behind to follow him. 'Private' and 'official' spheres are all completely subject to Jesus' command. The word of Jesus claimed them undividedly."[64] Yet Bonhoeffer's account of the mandates can invite a distinction between the private and the public which results in Christian obedience becoming invisible.

Bonhoeffer's attempt to rethink the Lutheran two-kingdom theology in the light of his Christological recovery of the significance of the visible church failed, I think, to escape from the limits of habits that have long shaped Lutheran thinking on these matters. However, there is another side to Bonhoeffer's political ethics that is seldom noticed or commented on. Bethge notes that though Bonhoeffer was shaped by the liberal theological and political tradition, by 1933 he was growing antiliberal not only in his theology but in his politics. Increasingly he thought liberalism — because of either a superciliousness or a weak laissez-faire attitude — was leaving decisions to the tyrant.[65]

Nowhere are Bonhoeffer's judgments about political liberalism more clearly stated than in a response he wrote in 194l to William Paton's *The Church and the New World Order*, a book that explored the church's responsibility for social reconstruction after the war. Bonhoeffer begins by observing that the upheavals of the war have made European Christians acutely conscious that the future is in God's hands and no human planning can make men the masters of their fate. Consequently, churches on the continent have an apocalyptic stance that can lead to other-worldliness but may also have the more salutary effect of making Christians recognize that the life of the church has its own God-given laws which differ from those governing the life of the world. Accordingly, the church cannot and should not develop detailed plans

for reconstruction after the war, but rather it must remind the nations of the abiding commandments and realities that must be taken seriously if the new order is to be a true order.[66]

In particular, Bonhoeffer stresses that in a number of European countries an attempt to return to full-fledged democracy and parliamentarianism would create even more disorder than obtained prior to the era of authoritarianism. Democracy requires a soil prepared by a long spiritual tradition and most of the nations of Europe, except for some of the smaller ones, do not have the resources for sustaining democracy. This does not mean that the only alternative is state absolutism, but rather that what should be sought is for each state to be limited by the law. This will require a different politics from the politics of liberalism.

In his *Ethics* Bonhoeffer starkly states (he has in mind the French Revolution) that "the demand for absolute liberty brings men to the depths of slavery."[67] In his response to Paton, he observes that the Anglo-Saxon word that names the struggle against the omnipotence of the state is "freedom," and the demand for freedom is expressed in the language of "rights and liberties."[68] But "freedom is a too negative word to be used in a situation where *all* order has been destroyed. And liberties are not enough when men seek first of all for some minimum security. These words remind us much of the old liberalism which because of its failures is itself largely responsible for the development of State absolutism."[69]

Bonhoeffer takes up this history again in his *Ethics*, suggesting that these developments cannot help but lead to godlessness and the subsequent deification of man, which is the proclamation of nihilism. This "hopeless godlessness" is seldom identified by hostility to the church but rather comes too often in Christian clothing. Such "godlessness" is particularly present, he finds, in the American churches which seek to faithfully build the world with Christian principles and ends with the total capitulation of the church to the world. Such societies and churches have no confidence in truth, with the result that the place of truth is usurped by sophistic propaganda.[70]

The only hope, if Europe is to avoid a plunge into the void after the war, is in the miracle of a new awakening of faith and the institution of God's governance of the world that sets limits to evil. The latter alternative, what Bonhoeffer calls "the restrainer," is the power of the state to establish and

maintain order.[71] In his reply to Paton he suggests that such an order limited by law and responsibility, which recognizes commandments that transcend the state, has more "spiritual substance and solidity than the emphasis on the rights of man."[72] Such an order is entirely different from the order of the church, but they are in close alliance. The church, therefore, cannot fail its responsibility to sustain the restraining work of the state.

Yet the church must never forget that her primary task is to preach the risen Jesus Christ, because in so doing she "strikes a mortal blow at the spirit of destruction. The 'restrainer,' the force of order, sees in the church an ally, and, whatever other elements of order may remain, will seek a place at her side. Justice, truth, science, art, culture, humanity, liberty, patriotism, all at last, after long straying from the path, are once more finding their way back to their fountain-head. The more central the message of the church, the greater now will be her effectiveness."[73]

Above I suggested that Bonhoeffer's attempt to reclaim the visibility of the church at least put him in the vicinity of trying to imagine a non-Constantinian church. Yet in his *Ethics* he displays habits of mind that seem committed to what we can only call a "Christian civilization," though Larry Rasmussen suggests that Bonhoeffer in the last stages of *Letters and Papers from Prison* began to move away from any Christendom notions.[74] Rasmussen directs our attention to the "Outline for a Book" Bonhoeffer wrote toward the end of his life. Rather than finishing the *Ethics*, which he expressed regret for not having done, if Bonhoeffer had lived, I believe, as does Rasmussen, he would have first written the book envisaged in his "Outline." The book hinted at there would have allowed Bonhoeffer to extend his reflections about the limits of liberal politics and in what manner the church might provide an appropriate alternative.

In his "Outline" Bonhoeffer begins with "a stocktaking of Christianity." In particular he suggests what it means for mankind to have "come of age" is the dream that humans can be independent of nature. As a result human creations have turned against their creators, making those that sought freedom enslaved to their self-created chains. The church provides no alternative, trapped by its invisibility, unwilling to risk itself on behalf of the world. Such a church is no more than a stop gap for the embarrassment of our suffering and death.[75] In the second chapter of his book, in terms reminiscent of *Sanctorum*

Communio, Bonhoeffer suggests he will begin with the question "Who is God?" in order to recover the God who is found only through our "participation in the being of Jesus." He proposes to end his book with an account of the church that will "have to take the field against the vices of *hubris*, power-worship, envy, and humbug, as the roots of all evil." The church will have to speak of "moderation, purity, trust, loyalty, constancy, patience, discipline, humility, contentment, and modesty."[76]

Finally Bonhoeffer says he intends to explore the importance and power of example, "which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus and is so important in the teachings of Paul," and whose importance has been underestimated.[77] I cannot say that if Bonhoeffer would have had the opportunity to write the book suggested in his "Outline," he would have forever left Constantinianism behind. But I remain convinced his attempt to think through what the recovery of the visible church entails — the implication of which, I am convinced, he was beginning to see in his last proposed book — is an invaluable resource for the challenges that those living after Bonhoeffer cannot ignore. He is now part of God's exemplification given for our redemption.

Notes

[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Nature of the Church," in *A Testament To Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990), 91.

[2] For the distinction between political theology and theological politics, see Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jurgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

[3] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000). Hereafter cited as Bethge.

[4] Marilynne Robinson, *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 110-111.

[5] I am referring to Bonhoeffer's remarks about Barth's "positivism of revelation" and his infamous suggestion that Christians must now live in the world as if *etsi deus non daretur* (even if there were no God). See *Letters and Papers From Prison*, enlarged ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1971), 328 and 360.

[6] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001). Originally published in English as *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1949). John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

[7] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), 208.
[8] It is extremely instructive to reread Harvey Cox's use of Bonhoeffer in his *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).
[9] Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 28, 33. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).
[10] Larry Rasmussen's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) remains one of the best attempts to understand Bonhoeffer's involvement in the plot to kill Hitler. I remain unconvinced, however, that Bonhoeffer thought this aspect of his life could be justified even if he did think, as Rasmussen suggests, in terms of just war considerations. For quite different accounts see Greg Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 3-33, and James McClendon's *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1986), 188-211.
[11] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York: Harper Collins, 1966), 32.
[12] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 219. Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, G. Leibholz, uses this quote in his "Memoir" in *The Cost of Discipleship*, 26. In *Life Together* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) Bonhoeffer observes "only in the Holy Scriptures do we get to know our own story. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God and Father of Jesus Christ and our God" (62).
[13] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 303.
[14] Quoted in Bethge, 722. At least one of the reasons Bonhoeffer was attracted to Barth is he shared Barth's distaste for pietism in any form. For example, Bonhoeffer complains that any definition of faith as "personal faith," "personal decision for Jesus," or "free decision of the individual," cannot help but distort the biblical understanding of faith. *True Patriotism*, ed. Edwin Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 149-50.
[15] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 135.
[16] *Sanctorum Communio*, 134, 209. Barth many years later regarded *Sanctorum Communio* as a theological miracle, finding it hard to believe such an extraordinary book could be written by someone only twenty-one, but even more startling that it could have been written at Berlin. Barth observes that if any vindication of the school of Seeberg is possible, it is so because this book exists. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 641.
[17] Bethge, 96.
[18] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 84). Charles Marsh has best demonstrated the influence of Barth on Bonhoeffer in his *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Oxford, 1994). Bonhoeffer may have revised his criticism of Barth after he had the opportunity to read the early volumes of the *Dogmatics*. In an essay, "The Visible Church in the New Testament," written in 1936, Bonhoeffer notes two dangers must be avoided regarding the place of the church in the world: (l) a docetic eschatology in which the church is assumed to be an incorporeal concept, and (2) a secular ecclesiology with a magical view of the sacraments. Bonhoeffer, displaying a sense of humor often present in his work, says "The former danger arises from the theology of Barth, understood wrongly; the latter from the theology of Dibelius, understood correctly." *A Testament To Freedom*, 160-61.
[19] Bethge, 150.
[20] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, ed. Edwin Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 87.

[21] Bethge, 205.
[22] *Ibid*., 205.
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 168-69. Bonhoeffer has no time for humanistic justifications of pacifism, because they confuse safety with peace. Yet it is not clear that Bonhoeffer assumed that his Christological pacifism required the disavowal of violence in every circumstance. In his famous Fano conference address in 1934 he does say, "brothers in Christ obey his word; they do not doubt or question, but keep his commandment of peace. They cannot take up arms against Christ himself — yet this is what they do if they take up arms against one another!" *No Rusty Swords*, 290.
[25] Gerhard Leibholz, "Memoir," in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Fortress, 1961), ll. Leibholz, Bonhoeffer's twin sister's husband, was also Jewish. The Bonhoeffer family desperately made arrangements for the Leibholz family to escape to England.
[26] Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom*, 169.
[27] *Ibid*., 173.
[28] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and the Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).
[29] Quoted by Bethge, 467.
[30] John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 136-37.
[31] It is not accidental that those who have been schooled by Yoder's work have noticed Bonhoeffer's insistence on the visibility of the church. See, for example, Mark Nation, "Discipleship in a World Full of Nazis" in the *Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 249-77; Barry Harvey, "A Post-Critical Approach to a 'Religionless Christianity," in *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1994), 39-58.
[32] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 324. In *True Patriotism* Bonhoeffer notes that the defining mark of the Constantinian age was not that Christians began to baptize their children but "that baptism became a qualification for civic life. The false development lies not in infant baptism but in the secular qualification of baptism. The two should clearly be distinguished" (l60).
[33] *Ibid*., 324.
[34] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 113.
[35] *Ibid*., 261-62.
[36] For example, Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics* claims that the justification of the western world lies in the divine justification of the church. The latter is possible only if the church is led to a full confession of her guilt through the cross (52).
[37] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 141.
[38] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 68.
[39] *Ibid*., 199.
[40] Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom*, 92.
[41] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 160. A constructive way to represent Bonhoeffer's politics is to look closely at his understanding of lying. The demand of truthfulness runs from the beginning to the end of his work culminating in his discussion in the *Ethics*, 326-34. His remark that anyone

who tells the truth cynically is lying is an invitation to extended reflection on the kind of politics necessary to produce people who can tell the truth without cynicism. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 163.

[42] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 277.

[43] *Ibid*., 260.

[44] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 287.

[45] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 71-85. Earlier in *Christ the Center* Bonhoeffer observes, "Ritschl and Herrmann put the resurrection on one side, Schleiermacher symbolizes it; in so doing they destroy the church," 45.

[46] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 327.

[47] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 310.

[48] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 326-27. "Methodism" simply seems to have been Bonhoeffer's general characterization of pietistic traditions. Unfortunately, his use of methodism as a term of derision rightly describes the denomination bearing that name.

[49] *Ibid*., 328.

[50] *Ibid*., 282.

[51] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 88-89.

[52] This passage comes from Bonhoeffer's essay "The Question of Baptism," written in 1942 in response to a controversy in the Confessing Church (*No Rusty Swords*, 160). Bonhoeffer observes that it is very understandable that in a secularized church there is a desire for a pure, authentic, truthful set of believers to exist. Such a desire is understandable but full of dangers because it is far too easy for a community ideal to take the place of the real community of God and because such a community might be understood as a contribution made by man.

[53] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 68.

[54] Bonhoeffer, *The Prayerbook of the Bible*, 163.

[55] Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom*, 106.

[56] Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 139.

[57] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 166-67.

[58] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 65.

[59] Bonhoeffer, *A Testament of Freedom*, 96-97.

[60] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 73-78.

[61] Bonhoeffer rightly worries how to justify the identification of the mandates. He rejects the Lutheran attempt to derive the orders from the world and attempts to justify them from the Bible. He observes "it is perhaps not by chance that precisely these mandates seem to have their type in the celestial world. Marriage corresponds with Christ and the congregation; the family with God the Father and the Son, and with the brotherhood of men with Christ; labor corresponds with the creative service of God and Christ to the world, and of men to God; government corresponds with the communion of Christ in eternity; the state corresponds with *telos* of God." *Ethics*, 295. Bonhoeffer's effort is clearly speculative, and not much should be made of his naming different mandates in different contexts.

[62] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 246. Benjamin Reist provides an enlightening discussion concerning the tension between Bonhoeffer's stress on the space the church must occupy and his use of the two-sphere language bequeathed to him by the Lutheran tradition. See Reist, *The Promise of*

Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1969), 85-90.

[63] While generally praising Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and in particular his account of the mandates because they "do not emerge from reality" but descend into it, Karl Barth suggests there still may remain just a hint of North German patriarchalism in Bonhoeffer's understanding of some having authority over others. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 22. Barth's comment is interesting in that his own account of the political implications of the Gospel has been criticized for exhibiting the same "arbitrariness" he finds in Bonhoeffer.

[64] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 134-35.

[65] Bethge, 289.

[66] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 109-10.

[67] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 38. This aspect of Bonhoeffer's work has been attacked in Germany by Klaus-Michael Kodalle in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Zur Kritik seiner Theologie* (Gutersloh: Guterslohes Verlagshaus, 1991). Wolfgang Huber defends Bonhoeffer against Kodalle in his "Bonhoeffer and Modernity," in *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Valley Forge, PA, Trinity Press, 1994), 5-19. I fear I am equally unsympathetic with Kodalle's critique and Huber's defence because they each remain determined by the categories of liberal political theory. Huber challenges Kodalle's dualism of individual and community, but fails to see that the heart of Bonhoeffer's challenge is ecclesial.

[68] In his "Thoughts on the Day of Baptism of Dietrich Wilhelm Rudiger Bethge" Bonhoeffer observes, "We thought we could make our way in life with reason and justice, and when both failed, we felt that we were at the end of our tether. We have constantly exaggerated the importance of reason and justice in the course of history." *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 298.

[69] *Ibid*., 113.

[70] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 41-42.

[71] *Ibid*., 44.

[72] Bonhoeffer, *True Patriotism*, 113.

[73] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 45.

[74] Larry Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, 85-86. I am sure Rasmussen is right but I obviously have a different account of what Bonhoeffer means when he says Christians must acknowledge the "world come of age."

[75] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 380-83. Bonhoeffer's description of the human project to safeguard life against accidents (380) has only recently become a theme in the work of postmodern theorists. In his "Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism," he observes "for the greater part of our lives pain was a stranger to us. To be as free as possible from pain was unconsciously one of our guiding principles" (298). Bonhoeffer saw that the attempt to escape suffering was the breeding ground for self-willed tyranny.

[76] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 383.

[77] *Ibid*.