Bonhoeffer on Truth and Politics

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Bonhoeffer's Passion for Truth

It is not accidental that my account of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a political theologian makes him an ally of John Howard Yoder. Bonhoeffer, like Yoder, sought to recover the visibility of the church amid the ruins of Christendom from the beginning to the end of his life. To so interpret Bonhoeffer risks making him subject to the same criticism often directed at Yoder — i.e., he gives an account of the church that makes the church politically irrelevant. Those tempted to so criticize Bonhoeffer, of course, have to give some account for the political character of his life. For example, they might suggest that his life was more political than his theology or (as I suggested in the first lecture) even that his theology is particularly well suited for totalitarian contexts but fails to provide an adequate account of how Christians should live in democratic societies.

In this lecture I hope to counter these kinds of criticisms by developing Bonhoeffer's understanding of the relation between truth and politics. I will try to show that Bonhoeffer rightly understood that the gift the church gives to any politics is the truthful proclamation of the Gospel. As far as I know, Bonhoeffer's understanding of truth and politics has seldom been commented on or analyzed. One of the reasons may well be the general assumption that truth and politics, particularly in democratic regimes in which compromise is the primary end of the political process, do not mix.[1] I hope to show that Bonhoeffer saw that such a view of politics abandons the political realm to violence.

I should be candid that (as we say in the South) I also have a dog in this fight. Because I am so influenced by Yoder I am often accused of abandoning the politics necessary to achieve relative justice.[2] My oft-made claim that the first task of the church is not to make the world more just but to make the world the world is interpreted as a call for Christians to withdraw from the world. By focusing on Bonhoeffer's understanding of how the church serves

the world by being God's truthful witness, I hope to direct attention to the same theme in my own work. For it has always been my conviction, a conviction I believe I learned from Barth, that the character of a society and state is to be judged by the willingness to have the Gospel preached truthfully and freely.[3] By drawing on Bonhoeffer's understanding of the significance of truthfulness, I hope to show the political significance of the Christian refusal to lie.

Bonhoeffer was a relentless critic of any way of life that substituted agreeableness for truthfulness. For example, in a speech he gave in 1932 at the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia, he attacked attempts to secure unity by focusing on "practical" issues rather than fundamental issues of theology. For Bonhoeffer, to ignore questions of theology, truth plays into the hands of the forces that the ecumenical movement was meant to counter. He observes that because there is no theology of the ecumenical movement, "ecumenical thought has become powerless and meaningless, especially among German youth, because of the political upsurge of nationalism."[4] Bonhoeffer observes:

> No good at all can come from acting before the world and one's self as though we knew the truth, when in reality we do not. This truth is too important for that, and it would be a betrayal of this truth if the church were to hide itself behind resolutions and pious so-called Christian principles, when it is called to look the truth in the face and once and for all confess its guilt and ignorance. Indeed, such resolutions can have nothing complete, nothing clear about them unless the whole Christian truth, as the church knows it or confesses that it does not know it, stands behind them. Qualified silence might perhaps be more appropriate for the church today than talk which is very unqualified. That means protest against any form of the church which does not honour the question of truth above all things.[5]

Bonhoeffer saw little point to theological engagement if truth does not matter. He was, for example, quite critical of his fellow students at Union Theological Seminary. In his report of his study at Union in 1930-31, he noted that the upbringing and education of American students was essentially different from the education German students receive. According to Bonhoeffer, to

understand the American student, you need to experience life in a hostel which produces a spirit of comradeship and a readiness to help one another. The unreservedness of life together, "the thousandfold 'hullo'," manifests the American desire before all else to maintain community. In the tension between the attempt to say the truth and the will for the community, the latter always prevails in America. Fairness, not truth, becomes the primary commitment necessary to sustain community for Americans. As a result "a certain levelling in intellectual demands and accomplishments" shapes the life of American educational institutions. Intellectual competition and ambition are lacking, making innocuous the work done in seminar, discussion, and lecture.[6]

Bonhoeffer's views of his fellow students reflected his general account of American religious and political life. His observation that America represents a form of "Protestantism without Reformation" is often quoted, but why he thought such a characterization appropriate is seldom explored. Bonhoeffer thought the "Protestant fugitives" who came to America did not come to enact another struggle. Rather Protestants claimed the right "to forgo the final suffering in order to be able to serve God in quietness and peace. . . . In the sanctuary there is no longer a place for strife. Confessional stringency and intolerance must cease for the person who has himself shunned intolerance. With his right to flee the Christian fugitive has forfeited the right to fight. So, at any rate, the American Christian understands the matter."[7]

Because the American student of theology sees the question of truth primarily in the light of this understanding of community, preaching cannot aspire to the truthful proclamation of the Gospel. Rather "preaching becomes an edifying narration of examples, a ready recital of [the preacher's] own religious experiences, which are not of course assigned any positively binding character."[8] As a result, the relation of denominations to each other in America is not one that represents a struggle for the truth in preaching or doctrine. One might think, Bonhoeffer reflects, that such a situation would be favorable for the possibility of the unity of the churches of Jesus Christ. If the struggle for truth no longer divides the church, then surely the unity of the church must already exist. Yet just the opposite is the case. "Precisely here, where the question of truth is not the criterion of church communion and church division, disintegration is greater than anywhere else. That is to say, precisely where the struggle for the right creed is not the factor which governs everything, the

unity of the church is more distant than where the creed alone unites and divides the church."[9]

Christians came to America having fought hard to renounce confessional struggles. Subsequent generations born free of the battles for which their forebears fought no longer think it necessary to fight about anything. The struggle over the creed which occasioned the flight of their fathers and mothers becomes — for their sons and daughters — something that is itself unchristian. "Thus for American Christianity the concept of *tolerance* becomes the basic principle of everything Christian. Any intolerance is in itself unchristian."[10] Because Christians in America have no place for the conflict truthfulness requires, they contribute to the secularization of society;[11] a society, moreover, which finds itself unable to subject politics to truth and the conflict truthfulness requires.[12] Tolerance becomes indifference and indifference leads to cynicism.

Bonhoeffer's criticism of American theology, education, and politics reflects his lifelong passion to speak the truth. For example, in a letter to Bishop Ammundsen on August 8, 1934, Bonhoeffer discusses an upcoming conference at Fano and the address he was to give. He confesses he is more worried about those who identify with opposition to Hitler than with the German Christians. The former will be worried that they should not appear unpatriotic, but they must recognize that those that come together at Fano do so not as Germans, Danes, or Swiss but as Christians. Bonhoeffer continues:

> Precisely because of our attitude to the state, the conversation here must be completely honest, for the sake of Jesus Christ and the ecumenical cause. We must make it clear — fearful as it is — that the time is very near when we shall have to decide between National Socialism and Christianity. It may be fearfully hard and difficult for us all, but we must get right to the root of things, with open Christian speaking and no diplomacy. And in prayer together we will find the way. I feel that a resolution ought to be framed — all evasion is useless. And if the World Alliance in Germany is then dissolved — well and good, at least we will have borne witness that we were at fault. Better that than to go on vegetating in this untruthful way. Only complete truth and truthfulness will help us now. I know that many of my German friends think otherwise.

But I ask you urgently to appreciate my views.[13]

"Only complete truth and truthfulness will help us now" was not just a reflection of Bonhoeffer's understanding of the challenge presented by the rise of Hitler. For Bonhoeffer, Hitler or no Hitler, the peace and justice any social order might try to achieve was impossible without truth. "There can only be a community of peace when it does not rest on *lies* and *injustice*."[14] The mistake of Anglo-Saxon thought is the subordination of truth and justice to the ideal of peace. Indeed, such a view assumes that the very existence of peace is proof that truth and justice have prevailed. Yet such a view is illusory, in that the peace that is the reality of the Gospel is identified with the peace based on violence. No peace is peace but that which comes through the forgiveness of sins. Only the peace of God preserves truth and justice. So "neither a static concept of peace (Anglo-Saxon thought) nor even a static concept of truth . . . comprehends the Gospel concept of peace in its troubled relationship to the concepts of truth and righteousness."[15]

For Bonhoeffer nothing less than the truth of the Gospel was at stake in the confrontation with Hitler. Bonhoeffer's famous radio address of 1933, which criticized the *Führer* concept, was not based on liberal democratic ideas but rather reflected Bonhoeffer's concern with authority.[16] According to Bonhoeffer, in the past, leadership was expressed through the office of the teacher, the statesman, and the father, but now the "Leader" has become an end in himself. When leadership was based on office, it required commitment to standards that were public and therefore capable of some rational justification. But the new leadership is based on choice, answering to nothing other than its own self-justification.[17]

Sociologically, Bonhoeffer attributes this change to the breakdown of German society after the First World War. After the war the German people felt lost, dominated by techniques intended to dominate nature now turned against their makers, distrusting all political, philosophical, and religious ideologies, and overwhelmed by the insignificance of the individual confronted by the dull power of the mass. The significance of the individual and the possibility of real community seemed to be forever destroyed. "The individually formed, autonomous personality and the idea divorced from reality seemed to have gone bankrupt. And from this need there now arose the passionate call for a new authority, for association, for community."[18] Hitler, the leader who

exploited this hunger for significance, mocks God and in so doing becomes himself an idol no longer subject to truthful correction.

Bonhoeffer's criticism of American religious and political life as well as his analysis of the rise of Hitler can make uncomfortable reading for some who admire his opposition to Hitler but do not consider his understanding of why Hitler must be opposed. Bonhoeffer's assumption that truth matters makes him an unlikely ally of the widespread assumption that — given that no one knows the truth — the best we can do ecclesially and politically is to be tolerant. Moreover, some may object that it is not clear what Bonhoeffer took truth to be. I hope to show the best way to respond to those who fear the "conservative" implications of Bonhoeffer's passion for truth and his understanding of truth is to be found in an essay that appears in his *Ethics*, "What Is Meant By 'Telling the Truth'?" Not only does this essay indicate that from the beginning to the end of his life truth mattered to Bonhoeffer, but that, even more important, he understood that far more significant than offering a "theory of truth" is giving us an account of what it means to be truthful.

Bonhoeffer on "Telling the Truth"

Joseph Fletcher claims that Bonhoeffer's essay "is as radical a version of the situational method as any Christian relativist could call for."[19] Fletcher's description of Bonhoeffer's position is far off the mark. He surely must have known better or at least must have been a better reader than his description of Bonhoeffer's position seems to suggest. Fletcher may have been misled by Bonhoeffer's claim that "'telling the truth' may mean something different according to the particular situation in which one stands. Account must be taken of one's relationship at each particular time. The question must be asked whether and in what way a man is entitled to demand truthful speech of others."[20] It is also true that Bonhoeffer argues that in formal terms the description of the lie as a discrepancy between thought and speech is inadequate. There is a way of speaking which can be correct but still is a lie, i.e., when a notorious liar for once tells "the truth" in order to mislead, or when a correct statement contains a deliberate ambiguity or omits something essential necessary to know the truth.[21]

Bonhoeffer's account of the lie is determined by his understanding of reality. We are obligated to speak truthfully about reality, but we must remember

that reality names not only what is "out there" but our relation to what is "out there." According to Bonhoeffer every word we speak should be true. To be sure, the veracity of what we say matters; but the relation between ourselves and others which is expressed in what we say is also a matter of truth or untruth. "The truthful word is not in itself constant; it is as much alive as life itself. If it is detached from life and from its reference to the concrete other man, if 'the truth is told' without taking into account to whom it is addressed, then this truth has only the appearance of truth, but it lacks its essential character."[22] Bonhoeffer observes that some may object to this view of truthfulness on the grounds that truthful speech is not owed to this or that individual person, but to God. He responds that this is correct as long as one remembers that God is not a "general principle, but the living God who has set me in a living life and who demands service of me within this living life."[23]

Bonhoeffer acknowledges that the concept of the living truth is dangerous to the extent it may give the impression that the truth can be tailored to fit this or that situation, making it difficult to tell the difference between truth and falsehood. The complexity of his account, however, does not lead him to equivocate about lying. For example, he says that one might think that the man who stands behind his word makes his word a lie or a truth, but that is not enough because "the lie is something objective and must be defined accordingly."[24]

Bonhoeffer gives the example of a child who is asked in front of the class by a teacher if his father often comes home drunk. In fact, the student's father does often come home drunk, but in answer to the teacher the child denies that the teacher's description is true. According to Bonhoeffer, the child rightly lies in answer to a question that should have never been asked in a classroom. Bonhoeffer explains that "the family has its own secret and must preserve it," something which the teacher has failed to respect. Ideally the child would have the ability to answer the teacher in a manner that would have protected the family as well as the rule of the school. But that is to expect more from a child than should be expected. Bonhoeffer does not deny that "the child's answer can indeed be called a lie; yet this lie contains more truth, that is to say, in is more in accordance with reality than would have been the case if the child had betrayed his father's weakness in front of the class. According to the measure of his knowledge the child acted correctly. The

blame for the lie falls back entirely upon the teacher."[25]

It is against this background that we can appreciate Bonhoeffer's claim that "telling the truth is something which must be learnt."[26] He acknowledges that this will sound shocking to anyone who thinks telling the truth depends on moral character and that if we have a good character then not lying is child's play. But if the ethical cannot be divorced from reality, then continual practice in learning to discern and appreciate reality is a necessary ingredient in ethical action. That we must learn to tell the truth, that we must develop the skills of description to tell the truth, is the background presumption necessary to understand Bonhoeffer's remark that only the cynic claims "to speak the truth" at all times and places.

Bonhoeffer's insistence that politics can never be divorced from truth is prismatically illumined by his understanding of cynicism. In a letter to Bethge in December 1943, Bonhoeffer reports he is working on his essay on "What is 'speaking the truth'?" in which he is trying to draw a sharp contrast between trust, loyalty, and secrecy and the "cynical" conception of truth. According to Bonhoeffer "anyone who tells the truth cynically is lying."[27] Yet cynicism is the vice that fuels the habits to sustain a politics that disdains the truth.

For example, in *Letters and Papers From Prison* Bonhoeffer writes to Bethge (December 1943), describing a fellow prisoner who has come undone in prison. Bonhoeffer relates that this man now consults him about every little thing as well as reporting to him every detail of his life, such as when he has cried. Bonhoeffer's fellow prisoner simply has no life that he does not expose. This occasions in Bonhoeffer a remarkable reflection in which he tells Bethge he has been thinking again about what he wrote recently about fear:

> I think that here, under the guise of honesty, something is being passed off as 'natural' that is at bottom a symptom of sin; it is really quite analogous to talking openly about sexual matters. After all, "truthfulness" does not mean uncovering everything that exists. God himself made clothes for men; and that means that *in statu corruptionis* many things in human life ought to remain covered, and that evil, even though it cannot be eradicated, ought at least to be concealed. Exposure is cynical, and although the cynic prides himself on his exceptional honesty, or claims to want truth at all costs, he misses the crucial fact that since the fall there must

be reticence and secrecy.[28]

Bonhoeffer is quite aware that secrecy can also be the breeding ground of the lie. The reticence and the secrecy he is intent on protecting is what sustains relationships such as marriage and the family that should not be subjected to the gaze sponsored by ideological formations. What concerns him is how language itself is debased, made incapable of truth, by its misuse in the interest of "community." Each word, for example the word of command, which rightly is used in public service, must be rightly used if we are to be truthful. Commands — if used in the family — can sever the bonds of mutual confidence that sustains the trust crucial to family life.[29] But from Bonhoeffer's perspective modern developments have rendered words incapable of truthful expression:

> It is a consequence of the wide diffusion of the public word through the newspapers and the wireless that the essential character and the limits of the various different words are no longer clearly felt and that, for example, the special quality of the personal word is almost entirely destroyed. Genuine words are replaced by idle chatter. Words no longer possess any weight. There is too much talk. And when the limits of the various words are obliterated, when words become rootless and homeless, then the word loses truth, and then indeed there must almost inevitably be lying. When the various orders of life no longer respect one another, words become untrue.[30]

It is against this background, moreover, we can appreciate how and what Bonhoeffer thought was at stake for the church in the confrontation with Hitler. As early as *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer maintained that humans cannot place themselves into the truth without the help of revelation because the untruth of human self-understanding is only made apparent within the truth that revelation creates. Humans can only "recognize themselves as having been created anew from untruth for truth. But they recognize themselves as that only from within truth, within revelation — that is, in Christ, whether judged or pardoned."[31] Accordingly "the lie is primarily the denial of God as He has evidenced Himself to the world. 'Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?' (1 John 2:22)."[32]

Lies are nothing less than contradictions of the word of God and the reality which is created by God. The purpose of our words, in unity with the word of God, is to "express the real, as it exists in God; and the assigned purpose of our silence is to signify the limit which is imposed upon our words by the real as it exits in God."[33] For Bonhoeffer, the source of the lie is always our penchant for abstraction. Therefore the true meaning of correspondence with reality is neither civility or opposition to the factual, but rather the attempt to understand reality without the real man. To attempt to live without Jesus Christ, the One before whom all factual reality derives its ultimate foundation and its ultimate annulment, is to live in "an abstraction to which the responsible man must never fall victim; it is to fail to make contact with reality in life; it is to vacillate endlessly between the extremes of servility and revolt in relation to the factual."[34]

I do not think Bonhoeffer believes that every word we use must gain its immediate intelligibility from Christ. As Rowan Williams suggests, the truth to which Christological dogmas gesture is not so much a concern with rationality or a comprehensive elucidation of all that is, but more with the "need to preserve the possibility of the kind of encounter with the truth-telling Christ that stands at the source of the Church's identity."[35] The threat to truth for Christians comes not from the difficulty of developing an unproblematic correspondence theory of truth, but rather from the lies that speak us disguised as truth. Those are the lies Bonhoeffer rightly feared made possible the rise of Hitler and the ongoing lies necessary to sustain him in power. The failure of the church to oppose Hitler was the outcome of the failure of Christians to speak the truth to one another and to the world.

Living in Truth

Some may find troubling the account I have given of Bonhoeffer's understanding of truth and politics. The implications of his understanding of truthfulness for politics could even suggest he favored a theocracy. Though I do not share the general presumption that theocracy is a "bad idea,"[36] Bonhoeffer remained far too Lutheran to entertain a theocratic alternative. For example, in his essay "The Church and the New Order in Europe," written in 1941 in response to William Paton's *The Church and the New Order*, he observes that there is a new recognition that the political order

also is under the Lordship of Christ. The political order, therefore, cannot be considered a domain which lives on its own terms apart from God's plan. "The commandments of God indicate the limits which dare not be transgressed, if Christ is Lord. And the Church is to remind the world of these limits."[37] Accordingly, the Church cannot and should not try to develop a detailed plan for postwar reconstruction, but it should remind the nations of the reality the commandments entail if the new order is to be a "true order."

In particular, Bonhoeffer suggested that the "chaos" behind the war could not be overlooked if the new order was to be true and just. National Socialism was made possible because there was just enough justice in some of Germany's claims against the "peace" established in the railway wagon at Compiègne to make credible Hitler's presentation of himself as a prophet of justice.[38] For Bonhoeffer there is no way to the future that does not truthfully acknowledge the sins of the past.

Bonhoeffer grasped the challenge modern politics presents for those committed to truthfulness. His views on the politics of the lie we confront are quite similar to Hannah Arendt's understanding of the lies associated with modern politics. Arendt observes that the politics of the lie we experience in our day is quite different than the traditional political lie. In traditional politics, by which I assume she means the kind of politics Machiavelli represented, the lie was assumed a necessity in diplomacy and statecraft to protect secrets or intentions that had never been made public or could not be made public.[39] In contrast the modern political lie deals not at all with secrets but what is generally known. For example, Arendt calls attention to a:

> highly respected statesmen who, like de Gaulle and Adenauer, have been able to build their basic policies on such evident non-facts as that France belongs among the victors of the last war and hence is one of the great powers, and "that the barbarism of National Socialism had affected only a relative small percentage of the country." All these lies, whether their authors know it or not, harbour an element of violence; organized lying always tends to destroy whatever it has decided to negate, although only totalitarian governments have consciously adopted lying as a first step to murder.[40]

Bonhoeffer's passion for the truth meant he would have stood against the lies that speak through us in modernity — lies all the more powerful because we believe we speak them by our own volition. We are, after all, "a free people." Moreover, we live in a manner that seems to make our lies true because we are so determined to make them true.[41] Wittgenstein remarks that "nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself" (*Culture and Value*, 34e). The clarity of Bonhoeffer's truthful witness to the truth was made possible by the clear evil he opposed. Yet such clarity is apparent only retrospectively. Most of Bonhoeffer's fellow Christians did not see the truth with his unflinching clarity.

In his book, *Living in Truth*, Vaclav Havel calls attention to the innocent act of a manager of a fruit and vegetable shop who puts in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: "Workers of the world, unite." Why, Havel asks, does the shop owner put the sign in his window? Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the possibility of the workers of the world uniting? Does he want to communicate his enthusiasm for this ideal to his fellow citizens? Does he have any idea what it might mean for workers to be so united?

Havel suspects the majority of shopkeepers who put such a sign in their window never think about what they are doing, nor does the sign express their true opinions. The poster was delivered from headquarters along with the onions. The shop owner put the sign in his window because he had always done so and if he did not he could get in trouble. Moreover, the greengrocer thinks nothing is at stake because he understands that no one really believes what the slogan says. What is important is the subliminal message the sign communicates. Havel suggests the sign's real message is: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace."[42]

To help us understand what is happening with the display of this sign, Havel suggests a thought experiment. Suppose the greengrocer had been asked to display the sign, "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient." Even though the new sign expresses the truth, Havel observes that the greengrocer would be ashamed to display such a sign. He is, after all, a human being with some sense of his own dignity. The display of the sign "Workers of

the world, unite" allows the greengrocer "to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same time concealing the low foundations of power. It hides them behind the facade of something high. And that something is *ideology*."[43]

I suspect most of us think there is a great distance between the sign in the greengrocer's window and the rise of National Socialism in Germany. Yet I think Bonhoeffer rightly saw that the Christian acceptance that truth does not count in such small matters prepared the ground for the terrible lie that was Hitler. In order to expose the small as well as the big lies, a community must exist that has learned to speak truthfully to one another. That community, moreover, must know that to speak truthfully to one another requires the time granted through the work of forgiveness. Such patient timefulness is a gift from the God the community believes has given us all the time we need to care for the words we speak to one another.[44] Any politics absent such a people is quite literally doomed to live lies that are the breeding ground of violence.[45]

An analysis of relationship between the acknowledgment of death, our ability to live truthful lives, and violence would be extremely informative. Bonhoeffer observes "the miracle of Christ's resurrection makes nonsense of that idolization of death which is prevalent among us today. Where death is the last thing, fear of death is combined with defiance. Where death is the last thing, earthly life is all or nothing. Boastful reliance on earthly eternities goes side by side with a frivolous playing with life. . . . The drastic acceptance or rejection of earthly life reveals that only death has any value here. To clutch at everything or to cast away everything is the reaction of one who believes fanatically in death."[46] Where death is everything, violence cannot be kept at bay. Bonhoeffer believed that the church is the sign God has placed in the windows of the world to make possible a truthful politics.

This means Bonhoeffer's observations about the character of theological education in America are not what might be considered his personal prejudices. Rather they are a challenge to teacher and student alike that few things are more important than our holding ourselves, as well as being held by the church, to speak the truth. As odd as it may sound, given the accommodated character of the church in liberal societies, if the church does not itself preach the Gospel truthfully, then politically we condemn ourselves, and those to whom

we are pledged to witness, to what Bonhoeffer called "the void."[47] A sobering observation, but one that at least directs those who count ourselves Christian to the task God has given us, that is, to be a people capable of speaking truthfully to ourselves, to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to the world.[48]

Notes

[1] According to Hannah Arendt, to look on politics from the perspective of truth — and by truth, she meant "factual truth" — is to stand outside the political realm. She notes "truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues, because it has little to contribute to that change of the world and of circumstances which is among the most legitimate political activities." *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. with an Introduction by Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 570. Arendt is not recommending lying in politics but is trying to explain why the political realm so often seems immune to truthfulness. She notes a politics that acknowledges the need for the existence of impartial institutions, such as universities, improves the possibility of truth to prevail in public (571). Yet she observes such institutions remain exposed to all the dangers arising from social and political power.

[2] See, for example, Jeff Stout's appendix in the new edition of his *Ethics After Babel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 341-58.

[3] Barth challenged Hitler's regime on the grounds that Hitler was trying to determine what the church could preach. He did so from the conviction "that it is the preaching of justification of the Kingdom of God, which founds, here and now, the true system of law, the true State." Karl Barth, *Community, State, and Church*, with an introduction by Will Herberg (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1960), 126.

[4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, trans. Edwin Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 159.

[5] *Ibid*., 160.

[6] *Ibid*., 87.

[7] *Ibid*., 102-03. Though these judgements about American Christianity come early in Bonhoeffer's career, if the work in the *Ethics* is any indication he never changed his mind. For example, he contrasts the French and American revolutions, observing the latter was not based on the emancipation of man, but the limitation of all earthly powers by the sovereignty of God. Yet the process of secularization in America is as advanced as that in Europe. Bonhoeffer suggests that "the claim of the congregation to build the world on Christian principles ends only with the total capitulation of the Church to the world, as can be seen clearly enough by a glance at the New York church registers. If this does not involve a radical hostility to the Church that is only because no real distinction has ever been drawn here (America) between the offices of Church and state. Godlessness remains more covert. And indeed in this way it deprives the Church even of the blessing of suffering and of the possible rebirth which suffering may engender." *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), 40-41.

[8] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 88.
[9] *Ibid.*, 96.
[10] *Ibid.*, 103.
[11] Bonhoeffer had little use for the kind of education available at Union Theological Seminary. He thought the "theological atmosphere" at Union was accelerating the process of secularization of American society. According to Bonhoeffer the criticism from Union directed at fundamentalists and "Chicago humanists" is necessary, but no basis is given for rebuilding after demolition. He was particularly critical of the students at Union who had turned their backs on all genuine theology in order to study economic and political organizations. Theology in America had been transformed into ethics. Even if Barth is studied, the basic suppositions of those who read him are "so inadequate that it is almost impossible for them to understand what he is talking about." *No Rusty Swords*, 90.
[12] In a diary entry dated June 24, 1939, Bonhoeffer observes "there hardly ever seem to be 'encounters' in this great country, in which the one can always avoid the other. But where there is no encounter, where liberty is the only unifying factor, one naturally knows nothing of the community which is created through encounter. The whole life together is completely different as a result. Community in our (German) sense, whether cultural or ecclesiastical, cannot develop here." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: Harper/San Francisco, 1990), 498.
[13] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 286-87.
[14] *Ibid*., 168-69. John Paul II often sounds very much like Bonhoeffer to the extent the Pope maintains no freedom is worth having that is not disciplined by the truth. Jean Bethke Elshtain draws on Bonhoeffer and John Paul II in *Who Are We?: Critical Reflections and Hopeful Possibilities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Elshtain rightly thinks Bonhoeffer and John Paul II to be allies, particularly given our current cultural challenges.
[15] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 169.
[16] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 259-60. The address is found in *No Rusty Swords*, 190-204.
[17] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 194-96.
[18] *Ibid*., 194.
[19] Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 149.
[20] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 326.
[21] *Ibid*., 331. A fascinating exercise would be to compare Bonhoeffer's account of lying with Augustine's. On the surface Bonhoeffer seems to be denying Augustine's account of the lie as the use of speech to say what I know is not the case in order to deceive. However, Augustine's careful analysis of lying, which may well involve silence, is much closer to Bonhoeffer's account than would first appear. Though Bonhoeffer does not claim, as does Augustine, that one may never lie, the general direction of Bonhoeffer's understanding of lying is quite similar to Augustine's. For a subtle and compelling account of Augustine's position see Paul Griffith, "The Gift and the Lie: Augustine on Lying," *Communi* 26 (Spring 1999): 3-29.
[22] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 328.

[23] *Ibid*., 326-27.
[24] *Ibid*., 332.
[25] *Ibid*., 330.
[26] *Ibid*., 327. In *Culture and Value*, G.H. von Wright, ed., trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 35e, Ludwig Wittgenstein observes: "No one *can* speak the truth; if he has still not mastered himself. He *cannot* speak it; — but not because he is not clever enough yet. . . . The truth can be spoken only by someone who is already at home in it; not by someone who still lives in falsehood and reaches out from falsehood towards truth on just one occasion." Wittgenstein, perhaps more than anyone, knew that our speaking truthfully is a skill that not only requires attention to what we say but how we say it. Moreover, we can only learn to speak truthfully when our pride has been defeated.
[27] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 163. This remark, like much else Bonhoeffer has to say, often sounds quite similar to some of Wittgenstein's remarks about lying and how hard it is to avoid lying. For example in *Culture and Value* (39e), Wittgenstein observes: "How hard I find it to see what is *right in front of my eyes*! . . . You can't be reluctant to give up your lie, and still tell the truth." Later Wittgenstein comments, "Someone who knows too much finds it hard not to lie." A remark I suspect Bonhoeffer might appreciate.
[28] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 158.
[29] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 328. This kind of reflection is what informs Bonhoeffer's observation in *Letters and Papers From Prison* (148) that husbands and wives should have the same mind about matters even in the literary sphere. He confesses that he and his fianceé Maria are not yet on the same wave length about writers. She reads poets such as Rilke he regards as "decidedly unhealthy." Bonhoeffer's attitudes can be interpreted as an exemplification of an unrepentant male point of view. It would have been interesting to see how Bonhoeffer's views might have developed if he and Maria would have had the time to marry and live together. That said, I think he is right to contend that it is extremely important that marriage provide the time for husbands and wives to discover common judgements about matters that matter.
[30] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 329-30. Wendell Berry provides a contemporary complaint similar to Bonhoeffer's observation about the degradation of our language. He observes that a movement may lose its ability to speak truthfully when its enemies preempt its language. His example is organic farming, which became an end in itself making possible huge "organic" monocultures. This has made possible the attempt of the US Department of Agriculture to label food genetically engineered and irradiated to be called organic. Berry comments, "Once we allow our language to mean anything that anybody wants it to mean, it becomes impossible to mean what we say. When 'homemade' ceases to mean neither nor less than 'made at home,' then it means anything, which is to say that it means nothing." *In the Presence of Fear* (Great Barrington, ME: Orion Society Publication, 2001), 34-35.
[31] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, trans. H. Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 81-82.
[32] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 332.
[33] *Ibid*.
[34] *Ibid*., 198. In the section of the *Ethics* in which he discusses the "Concept of Reality,"

Bonhoeffer says, "Henceforth one can speak neither of God nor of the world without speaking of Jesus. All concepts of reality which do not take account of Him are abstractions" (6l).

[35] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000), 82.

[36] Allen Verhey has recently written an extremely intelligent analysis and defense of theocracy. See his *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 333-507.

[37] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *True Patriotism*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 109. See also Lecture 1.

[38] Bonhoeffer, *True Patriotism*, 111-12.

[39] For example, see Ruth Grant's subtle analysis of Machiavelli and Rousseau on the necessity of hypocrisy in her *Hypocrisy and Integrity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). "At the outset," Grant says, "we noted the peculiar susceptibility of liberal democracies to charges of hypocrisy. This is a function of both aspects of what I have called the 'paradox of democracy'; liberal democratic regimes make particularly strong claims to be able to provide open and honest political processes at the same time that those processes are structured so as to increase dependencies conducive to hypocritical political behavior" (176). Bonhoeffer might well agree with Grant's contention that some forms of hypocrisy may not only be necessary but justified in democratic regimes, but I do not think he would regard that as a good thing.

[40] Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, 565.

[41] Arendt tells the medieval anecdote about the sentry that was given to practical jokes who one night sounded the alarm just to give his townsfolk a scare. Everyone rushed to the walls. As a result he was the last one to rush to the walls. Arendt comments that the story illustrates how hard it is to lie to others without lying to oneself. She comments "The tale suggests to what extent our apprehension of reality is dependent upon our sharing the world with our fellow-men, and what strength of character is required to stick to anything, truth or lie, that is unshared. In other words, the more successful a liar is, the more likely he will fall prey to his own fabrications." *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, 566.

[42] Vaclav Havel, *Living in Truth*, ed. Jan Vladislav (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 42.

[43] *Ibid*., 42.

[44] For a powerful account on the importance of word care for Christians see Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 161-71. One of the offices John Howard Yoder thought crucial for the church was the one served by "agents of linguistic self-consciousness." He noted that this is a dangerous office because the tongue is hard to govern. The demagogue, the poet, the journalist, the novelist, the grammarian, are all in the business of steering society with the rudder of language. Too often concepts become reified by such people because it is through such concepts they make themselves indispensable. Yoder urges the teacher to watch for the "sophomoric temptation" to make verbal distinctions without substantial necessity. *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 32-33.

[45] For a fascinating, powerful account of the relationship between lies and violence, see Robert Dodaro, OSA, "Eloquent Lies, Just Wars and the Politics of Persuasion: Reading Augustine's *City of God* in a 'Postmodern' World," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 77-138. Dodaro argues that Augustine saw the lies that shaped Roman politics and political leaders drew their intelligibility

from the attempt to beat death by achieving political glory that would insure immortality. Dodaro thinks the same process is at work in attempts to justify the Gulf War.

[46] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 16-17.

[47] Bonhoeffer saw clearly that "the void" becomes possible as the alternative to Christianity. In the section of the *Ethics*, "Inheritance and Decay," he suggests that "it was only from the soil of the German Reformation that there could spring a Nietzsche" (28). In a manner that anticipates postmodern doubts about reason, Bonhoeffer notes that "contempt for the age of rationalism is a suspicious sign of failure to feel the need for truthfulness. If intellectual honesty is not the last word that is to be said about things, and if intellectual clarity is often achieved at the expense of insight into reality, this can still never again exempt us from the inner obligation to make clean and honest use of reason" (34). Finally he notes, "Luther's great discovery of the freedom of the Christian man and the Catholic heresy of the essential good in man combined to produce the deification of man. But, rightly understood, the deification of man is the proclamation of nihilism" (39). For Bonhoeffer's explicit use of the language of "the void," see page 44 of the *Ethics*.

[48] Wittgenstein observes, "You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are. That is the difference between writing about yourself and writing about external objects. You write about yourself from your own height. You don't stand on stilts or on a ladder but on your bare feet." *Culture and Value*, 33e. This remark is extremely important if what Christians believe is true — namely, we can only know the truth about ourselves by receiving it as a gift from God. So we can never trust our "truth," but rather must continually look to that truth that is God if we are to truthfully see ourselves.