

DISCIPLESHIP IN DISTRICT BONTHEFFER

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to deal with the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer from the perspective of Christian 'discipleship' with special emphasis placed upon the development of Bonhoeffer's understanding of that concept. Bonhoeffer begins with an acceptance of the traditional Lutheran understanding of 'discipleship' as 'vocation', but this Bonhoeffer soon finds cannot carry all the weight he intended.

Through a discussion of the history of the classic notion of the 'imitatio Christi' an attempt is made to show that, while giving it a decidedly Protestant meaning, Bonhoeffer has adopted it within his own theology. Bonhoeffer's theological understanding of 'discipleship' also lies at the heart of his decision making process. While the 'imitatio Christi' was originally rejected by the Reformers because they felt it led to a depreciation of ethics, the thesis of this paper is that Bonhoeffer's acceptance of the 'imitatio Christi' is in fact the source of his ethical strength.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce papier traite de la pensée de Dietrich Bonhoeffer, du point de vue d'un 'discipleship' chrétien, mettant une emphase particulière sur le développement de la connaissance de Bonhoeffer sur ce sujet. Au début Bonhoeffer accept ce que les Luthériens comprennent par ce terme 'discipleship' comme 'vocation', mais Bonhoeffer trouvera bientôt que ce n'a pas le poids nécessaire.

Travers la notion classique du 'imitatio Christi' on demontre que bien qu'il en donne une traduction Protestante, Bonhoeffer l'adapte dans sa propre théologie. Sa compréhension de 'discipleship' se tient en centre de toutes ses décisions. Tant que 'l'imitatio Christi' fut rejeté par les Réformeurs comme une dépréciation d'éthique, ce papier insiste que 'l'imitatio Christi' est pour Bonhoeffer la source de sa force moral.

INTRODUCTION

There are certain factors which I believe make this an original work. Of primary importance must be the thesis of the paper, which is the interpretation of Bonhoeffer's theological and ethical thought from the perspective of 'discipleship'. This in itself has not been attempted and for this reason the findings of this paper must also be original.

Furthermore, since 1972 no secondary works on Bonhoeffer have to the best of my knowledge been published, but many can soon be expected. This is due to the fact that since 1972 many original works by Bonhoeffer have been either published or translated for the first time. In 1972 the fifth volume of Bonhoeffer's Gesammelte Schriften was released by Eberhard Bethge. In 1973 the third English volume of Bonhoeffer's Collected Works was translated and published under the title of True Patriotism. In 1974 the sixth volume of the Gesammelte Schriften was released in Germany and finally in 1975 Bonhoeffer's "Lectures on Preaching" were translated by C. E. Fant in Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching. All these primary sources have greatly enlarged the amount of material available to students of Bonhoeffer and their availability has in part helped to assure the originality of this enterprise.

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Chapter I

DISCIPLESHIP AS VOCATION

All comprehensive studies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer have one thing in common. They all attempt to interpret Bonhoeffer from a perspective they consider as central to his thought which at the same time is also useful as an organizing principle to assure continuity in the exposition of his thought. These perspectives tend to fall into two primary categories with slight variations in each. One perspective attempts to give Bonhoeffer's work an ecclesiastical interpretation, a method which relies heavily on Bonhoeffer's role in the early years of the church struggle. W. Kuhns' book In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and René Marle's Bonhoeffer: The Man and His Work are good examples of the fruits of this perspective but the limitations are also obvious. From this method of interpretation, Bonhoeffer's writings against the church are merely seen as an attempt to return the church to a greater purity. According to Karl Barth, Bonhoeffer's prison letters become the 'stumbling block' of this perspective. If Bonhoeffer's life could be categorized as that of a churchman then why in the end was the role of the church apparently reduced to that of an 'arcane discipline'?

The other and probably the more adequate method of interpretation relies on Bonhoeffer's Christology and the best examples of this perspective are J. D. Godsey's work The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and J. A. Phillips' Christ For Us In The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Although this theme does run through all the stages of Bonhoeffer's life, the 'stumbling block' of this perspective is that one tends to forget about Bonhoeffer the man. Bonhoeffer's theology was greatly influenced

by his life and the dogmatic conceptualizations that arose out of his life were always a step behind. In addition, there are many gaps in Bonhoeffer's writings and at times we can only discover his Christology by deductive reasoning or implication.

Rather than see Bonhoeffer's thought from the well worn Christological centre, I have chosen to concentrate on another element which is central to both his thought and his life, namely 'discipleship'.¹ For Bonhoeffer discipleship is a style or pattern of life determined by the deepest of theological convictions. Many of the problems of correlating his life and thought do not exist if seen from this point of view, for Bonhoeffer answered the call to discipleship with both his life and his thought.

This is not to say that the other two methods of interpretation are not important, but rather it is a recognition of the interrelatedness of all the major themes. If one is to look at the different elements of Bonhoeffer's life, the theology, the ecclesiology and the ethics, then one is bound to conclude that Bonhoeffer changed greatly throughout his life. However, what attracts one to Bonhoeffer's work in the first place is the unity and interrelatedness of these three themes and this never changes.

1. Bonhoeffer uses the term 'disciple' in the larger sense meaning 'followers'. I am also using the term in this sense and I believe that this can be supported. The common belief is that disciple refers to one of the Twelve. In the Gospels, however, the term is used about two hundred and thirty times, ninety per cent of which refer to a larger group than the original Twelve. See The Lutheran Cyclopedia (1911), and The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XIV (1967).

As Bonhoeffer says,

Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.¹

The important clue in this phrase is Bonhoeffer's use of the term 'the living Christ'. Bonhoeffer differentiates this from what may be termed an ideological and dogmatic conceptualization. An ideology supplies a principle which must be applied to a given situation. It also has its own implicit and explicit structure which inherently determines its own application. The living Christ, on the other hand, provides the impetus to act without the necessary forms of an abstraction and therefore is not limited by that conceptualization. Bonhoeffer makes this clear when he states,

An abstract Christology, a doctrinal system, a general religious knowledge on the subject of grace or on the forgiveness of sins, render discipleship superfluous, and in fact they positively exclude any idea of discipleship whatever, and are essentially inimical to the whole conception of following Christ.²

This same principle which Bonhoeffer applies to his Christology,

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1. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. The Cost of Discipleship. Page 50.
 2. Ibid.

he also applies to his understanding of the disciple. Bonhoeffer had no given set of presuppositions or a particular anthropology to which his concept of the disciple had to conform. A poem he wrote while in Tegel Prison is probably the best illustration of Bonhoeffer's position. In the poem entitled "Who Am I?", Bonhoeffer rejects the necessity of an anthropology in favour of the Christ/disciple relationship, thereby allowing a definition of the self to be determined totally by one's relationship to God. In his words,

Who am I?
They mock me, these lonely questions of mine,
Whoever I am, thou knowest,
O God I am thine.¹

Bonhoeffer's ultimate concern, to use a much overused phrase, was therefore not a particular Christology or a particular anthropological understanding of discipleship as independent realities, but rather his concern was Christology and discipleship held together in dialectical and polemical unity. This unified relationship between Christ and the disciple is the central motif of Bonhoeffer's writings.

This relationship is characterized by two primary concepts, the call of Christ and the disciple's response. As a man is encountered by the call, he is bound to Christ. These two ingredients remained the 'cactus firmus' of all of Bonhoeffer's

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Letters and Papers From Prison.
Page 348.

writings. Although the call was invariably heard through different forms and structures, the response was always one of radical unquestioning obedience. Even though the form that this obedience took also changed throughout Bonhoeffer's life, the fact of the obedience itself remained.

These changes in his understanding of the call and response were due largely to necessity rather than choice. Next to Luther and Kierkegaard there have been few theologians whose theology is so obviously and directly determined by the experiences of their lives. Most theologians lead a stable and secure life in academic and ecclesiastical fields and their theologies often reflect this state. Bonhoeffer was forced to change environments often and his theology changed accordingly, maturing with each successive stage. These changes in Bonhoeffer's theology are not as radical as is often assumed and according to him there are no breaks in the continuity of his thought. Each new stage is built upon the foundation of the previous stage. This has perhaps been stated most succinctly by Bonhoeffer's twin sister, Sabine Leibholz-Bonhoeffer, who wrote that the stages of Bonhoeffer's life "...are to be understood not as separate states following one upon another in a chronological sequence, as though Dietrich left the Christian behind him once he became a Contemporary, but rather in the sense that every advance to a fresh stage in life subsumed the preceding ones within itself".¹

1. Leibholz-Bonhoeffer, Sabine. The Bonhoeffers: Portrait of a Family.
Page 51.

Bonhoeffer began his career in an academic environment and everything pointed to his success as a professor of Systematic Theology. His studies started at the University of Berlin in 1923.¹ The University was at the time renowned for its abundance of famous Liberal theologians and it was under their influence that Bonhoeffer first came. The roots of Liberal Theology, or 'modernist theology' as it is sometimes called, reach back to Friedrich Schleiermacher. The version subscribed to by Bonhoeffer's teachers was greatly determined by the efforts of William Herrmann and Albrecht Ritschl, from whom the present Liberals digressed only slightly. All worked from one major assumption, namely that experience must be the basis of all theology. In other words, there must be a movement from man towards God. Among the theologians at Berlin subscribing to this theological bent were Ernst Troeltsch, Karl Holl, Reinhold Seeberg and Adolph von Harnack, but these also were diverse in their interests.

Troeltsch, the Systematic theologian of the History of Religions school, came into conflict with the other three whose emphasis lay on the individual's ability to transcend both history and nature. Whereas the others sought the 'absolute principles' and 'irreducible essences' of Christianity, Troeltsch, strongly influenced by Hegel and Lessing, felt that Christianity

1. Very little can be said about Bonhoeffer's life that has not been said before. Therefore, I will mention biographical material only in passing and where it arises as a definite influence upon the topic under discussion.

must realize that it occurs within history which, by his definition, means Christianity is made relative and limited by its historical conditions. This was not to say, however, that the institutional church is without authority for it remains the 'highest synthesis' of the legalistic and redemptive aspects of mankind. Although Troeltsch died shortly before Bonhoeffer came to Berlin, he did learn from him that the social dimension must be taken seriously. The issues Troeltsch had raised were still in the air and were vigorously attacked by one of Bonhoeffer's teachers, Reinhold Seeberg.

It was under Seeberg's supervision that Bonhoeffer's dissertation was written, but it appears that Seeberg had little influence upon him concerning matters of the church. From Seeberg, however, Bonhoeffer did inherit a hostility toward metaphysics and an understanding of the arbitrariness of traditional dogma.

The greatest influence upon Bonhoeffer came from Adolph von Harnack. Harnack was the major figure to be reckoned with as the representative of the Liberal Theology and 'Kulturprotestantismus'. Bonhoeffer well understood the struggle between him and the 'Offenbarungstheology' as represented by Karl Barth. Both Harnack and Barth had a profound influence upon Bonhoeffer even though at the time of his writing of his first published work, Sanctorum Communio, he had studied under neither.

Sanctorum Communio was written in 1927 and is by itself a good indication of where Bonhoeffer stood within the theological

climate of the times. With the subtitle of the book being "A Dogmatic Inquiry Into the Sociology of the Church", it becomes clear that it was the argument between Troeltsch and Harnack which determined the subject and approach of Bonhoeffer's dissertation. The argument between Troeltsch and Seeberg determined Bonhoeffer's struggle with the church, and the dialectical methodology of Revelational theology became Bonhoeffer's own methodology. Troeltsch had also attempted a work which combined sociological realities with church dogmatics but his enterprise failed and he overemphasized sociology. Bonhoeffer, eager not to make the same mistake as Troeltsch, saw Revelation as a dialectical process and argued that Sanctorum Communio was theological rather than sociological and its place is accordingly within Christian dogmatics. It would seem that an undertaking such as this which engaged the greatest theological influences of the times would have a monumental effect. After all, Bonhoeffer had his feet firmly planted in a reconciliatory fashion in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, as is generally the case with dissertations, it was received without comment and dismissed as being a compromise.

In Sanctorum Communio Bonhoeffer argues that the church cannot be understood from any outside standard, the only adequate standard being the Christian Revelation. The church can be understood only from within and through the Revelational foundation of Jesus Christ. Both the theological and sociological realities Bonhoeffer struggled with evolved into the one major theme of the book, 'Christ exists as the Church' and only

through the Church does Christ exist for us. Once this fact is established, then the Church may be seen as an empirically verifiable community or institution towards which all social theories and philosophies may apply. His effort to unite sociological forms and structures to Revelational theology is reminiscent of Luther's distinction between the 'visible Church' and the 'hidden character of faith'. The visible sociological forms of the Church such as preaching and the sacraments must also be seen as the forms through which the Holy Spirit operates. The Church becomes God's continuing bearer of Revelation, assuming its empirical form in time and space as a human community. As such, Christ is seen as a person, a very real person, who is present spatially and temporally in and as the community of Revelation.

One of the most distinctive and important concepts used by Bonhoeffer in this his first work, is that of 'collective personality'. Drawing upon the classic distinction made by Tönnies between 'Gemeinschaft' (community) and 'Gesellschaft' (society), Bonhoeffer sees 'community' in the true sense of the term as possible only on the basis of Revelation. The influence of the Personalist school may also be seen at work in Bonhoeffer's understanding.

Because the Church is 'Christ existing as community', the Church must be understood as a collective person. The Church is in a very real sense the 'corpus Christi', the body of Christ.

Christ is not only the head of the

community but the community itself.^{1.}

And further,

The community is the body of Christ,
it does not represent the body of Christ.^{2.}

In his understanding of the 'collective personality', Bonhoeffer attempted the integration of theological and sociological approaches to his understanding of the relation between the individual, the society and Christ. The collective personality is to be found within the social individual as one structural unit. Both sin and repentance, therefore, are also collective, for God "...can see the whole people in a few individuals, just as He saw and reconciled the whole of mankind in one man".^{3.}

It is important to note that discipleship is grounded within Bonhoeffer's understanding of the Church and it is only within the Church that discipleship takes place. Bonhoeffer states bluntly that, "A man who is not in the church does not live in communion with Christ".^{4.}

Bonhoeffer is attempting to revive the Old Testament understanding of Covenant as opposed to the Pseudo-Lutheran tradition

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Christology.
Page 61.

2. Ibid... Page 60.
While these statements were actually made at a later more radical time, they do, I believe, clearly illustrate what Bonhoeffer was trying to state diplomatically in Sanctorum Communio.

3. Bonhoeffer, D.. Sanctorum Communio.
Page 84.

4. Ibid... Page 116.

of individual piety. In his words,

When peoples are called, God's will is seen shaping history, just as when the individual is called, he experiences his history. There is a will of God for the people, just as there is for the individual.¹

In 1928 Bonhoeffer travelled to Barcelona as a pastor to a German speaking congregation. In 1929 he returned to Berlin as an assistant at the University during which time he continued in the strain of Sanctorum Communio by writing Act and Being which was accepted as a lectureship qualification in 1930 and gained Bonhoeffer the right to teach Systematic Theology. This period is marked by the influence of Barth and the dialectical method which Bonhoeffer had come to depend upon for his own methodology.

Liberal theology, as presented by Bonhoeffer's teachers, was characterized by the fact that there is a realm where the divine and human meet. For Harnack, this was marked by 'transcendence' while for Troeltsch it was 'ontological'. But both, in terms of the Church at least, were 'spaces' within which persons might directly encounter God, and consequently God and the person are seen as united. For Bonhoeffer, relying on Luther as he had been taught by Holl, God stands over and against all human structures and philosophies which attempt to

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Sanctorum Communio.
Page 83.

trap God. Bonhoeffer's position is very Lutheran at this point. In fact, Bonhoeffer was more faithful to Luther than to the Lutheranism after Kant which had come to dominate the Church.

It was in Act and Being that Bonhoeffer finally confronted his Liberal teachers with all the tools Barth and his study of the Reformers had made available to him. Bonhoeffer turned to Barth and Luther to overthrow the Liberal understanding of Revelation as a metaphysical event which can be understood from outside of the Revelation itself. For Bonhoeffer Revelation cannot be understood apart from a person's understanding of himself and the world.

The Liberal understanding, and as Bonhoeffer sees it, particularly its epistemology, is rooted in post-Kantian Idealism. If a person can meet God in some realm, then there is no limitation to the self and God is reduced to an extension of the self. Whether God is 'a priori' as in Seeberg or an ontological fact of 'conscience' as in Holl, then God becomes determined by mankind and Revelation becomes superfluous. The absolute qualitative distinction between humanity and God which Bonhoeffer is presenting may be seen to be derived solely from Luther and Barth.

The role of the Church in relation to Revelation differed between Barth and Bonhoeffer, which points to a Christological difference that becomes more apparent in Bonhoeffer's later writings. Whereas Barth gave Bonhoeffer the methodological tools to attack the Liberal understanding of the relation

between humanity and God, it was the same Liberal theology that now informed Bonhoeffer of the dangers of Barth's position. Bonhoeffer in Act and Being accused Barth of being Kantian in the sense that he emphasized the act of belief to the point where it becomes non-rational and therefore God becomes totally inaccessible to us, requiring what Bultmann calls a 'sacrificium intellectus'; an apparently strong criticism for someone who thought he had broken free of the Liberal influence. The important distinction, however, can still be made. In Bonhoeffer's words,

God is not free from man but for man.¹

God is therefore accessible to man, but only within the restrictions established by Sanctorum Communio, only through the Word and in the Church.

As previously mentioned, the major motif of Bonhoeffer's writings is the call of Christ and the disciples' response. As a result of the theological basis of 'Christ exists as the Church' as established in Sanctorum Communio and Act and Being, we see that discipleship demands that the disciple be directed towards the Church which was, however sinful, the chosen instrument of the grace of God and therefore the only means of salvation and redemption.

With his phrase 'Christ exists as the Church', Bonhoeffer

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Act and Being.
Page 50.

has achieved two primary accomplishments. In the first place, he has guaranteed that Revelation is continuous and not limited to a past event or an event that occurs at the whim of a God removed from reality, nor is grace something which can be earned. In the second place, Bonhoeffer has assured that the existence of humanity is really touched by Revelation. The person as a social being is drawn into the fellowship of the Church and this Church is grounded in the personal character of the community whose centre is Christ. As such, Revelation can be approached only through concrete action; ontological being has no claim on Revelation. The call to discipleship is therefore entirely an ecclesiastical calling; a call to participate in the 'corpus Christi'. Conformed to the image of Christ, the Church is given new possibilities for service in the world.

In a critical appraisal of Emil Brunner written in 1932, Bonhoeffer wrote,

Wenn also gefragt wird: was soll ich tun? lautet die Antwort: bleibe in deinem Beruf! Dabei ist zu bedenken, dass es 'Beruf' im strengen Sinn nur für den Christen, für die Christliche Gemeinde geben kann. Beruf ist kein allgemein menschliches Ideal. Du bist von Gott berufen als der, der du bist, innerhalb der Gemeinde. Darin bleibe!'

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1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Gesammelte Schriften. Band V. Page 239.

"If it is asked: what shall I do? the answer is: stay in your vocation! One must think, that is 'vocation' in the strong sense only for the Christian, for the Christian community. Vocation is not a human ideal. You are called by God as he who you are, within the community. Therein stay!"

The translation is my own and will be used throughout this paper only where no other English translation is available.

Bonhoeffer, following Lutheran tradition, likewise preferred to use the term 'vocation' when discussing the life styles and tasks that faced the disciple within the Church as his social response to the call of Christ. Vocation in Bonhoeffer's theology becomes a description or a characterization of the relationship between Christ and the Christian disciple.

The Catholic Church maintains an understanding of vocation which has changed little over many years. In the early Church one personally responded to the 'call'; however, with the establishment of infant baptism, the depth of personal commitment tended to disappear. The idea of a Christian 'calling' came to life again with monastic Christianity. The monk had a divine call to perfection; it was a 'conversion', a 'second' or 'new baptism', a summons to a special mode of life within the Church known as 'vocation'.

According to Pius XI and Pius XII, there are two elements to vocation, the divine and the ecclesiastical. This understanding has been reaffirmed by different Catholic theologians using slightly different terminology but all maintain the dual nature of the concept. J. Lahitton, for example, calls the two elements 'material' and 'formal' which corresponds closely to the Papal version.

While terminologies may differ there is only one generally accepted theory by which 'vocation' as a theological concept is approached in Catholic theology. This is the 'attraction theory' proposed by C. A. Schleck which holds that God privately directs

his call to a person in whom there is felt a strong and permanent supernatural attraction within the soul which leads the individual to an ecclesiastical vocation. This second element of the ecclesiastical pursuit is necessary as an affirmation of the interior call.¹ If the ecclesiastical response is necessary as an affirmation of the interior calling, then the status of the laity in the Church is put into question. As a consequence, Catholic theology also holds that there must be a 'vocation to supernatural life' which includes the laity. This is similar to the Judaic understanding of Covenant, if perhaps slightly more metaphysical.

Vocation as a theological concept has dubious New Testament roots. In Ephesians 4:1 Paul says, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called".² In I Corinthians 7:20 Paul applies the term 'calling' to daily Christian work and on this basis Luther developed 'vocation' as a theological concept that applied

1. This is also the formal method by which the Bishop judges the validity of the internal call of the Priests. See 'vocation' in The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XIV.
2. The term 'vocation' can only be found in the A. V. at Eph. 4:1 where it translates as 'klēsis'. In the other nine places where it occurs it translates as 'klētos', meaning 'calling'. The R. V. and R. S. V. use 'calling' rather than 'vocation' in Eph. 4:1 as well. See R. Preston on 'Vocation' in A Dictionary of Christian Ethics ed. by J. Macquarrie. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's teacher, Karl Holl, was also interested in the meaning of 'Beruf' which can be translated either as 'vocation' or 'calling'. In an essay entitled "Die Geschichte des Wortes Beruf" in his Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte, Band 3, pages 189-219, he discusses the various uses and meanings of the word.

to man serving Christ and thereby meeting Christ at the place where he works, rather than having to work to meet Christ. Luther, with his understanding of vocation, wanted above all to avoid a doctrine of works. Luther wanted to abolish the medieval Catholic distinction between special religious merit which is attached to the clergy and the less religiously useful, though necessary, function of the laity. This most of the Reformers had in common. All vocations were said to rank the same with God, none more sacred or secular than the other. In Luther's words,

What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God. For what we do in our calling here on earth in accordance with His word and command He counts as if it were done in heaven for Him.... Therefore we should accustom ourselves to think of our position and work as sacred and well-pleasing to God, not on account of the position and the work, but on account of the word and faith from which the obedience and work follow. No Christian should despise his position and life if he is living in accordance with the word of God, but should say, "I believe in Jesus Christ, and do as the ten commandments teach and pray that our dear Lord may help me thus to do". That is a right holy life, and cannot be made holier even if one fast himself to death.... It looks like a great thing when a monk renounces everything and goes into a cloister, carries on a life of

asceticism, fasts, watches, prays, etc.... On the other hand, it looks like a small thing when a maid cooks and cleans and does other housework. But because God's command is there, even such a small work must be praised as a service to God far surpassing the holiness and asceticism of all monks and nuns. For here there is no command of God. But there God's command is fulfilled, that one should honour father and mother and help in the care of the home.¹

Calvin also echoed these sentiments when he stated,

The Lord commands everyone of us, in all the actions of life to regard his vocation...as it were, a post assigned him by the Lord, that he may not wander about in uncertainty all his days. Our life, therefore, will then be best regulated, when it is directed to this mark; since no one will be impelled by his own temerity to attempt more than is compatible with his calling, because he will know that it is unlawful to transgress the bounds assigned him. He that is in obscurity will lead a private life without discontent, so as not to desert the station in which God has placed him. It will also be no small alleviation of his cares, labours troubles and other burdens, when a man knows

1. Luther, Martin. Works, V, 102; IV, 341; V, 100; as quoted in Paul Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics. Pages 154 - 155.

that in all these things he has God for his guide. The magistrate will execute his office with greater pleasure, the father of a family will confine his duty with more satisfaction, and all, in their respective spheres of life, will bear and surmount the inconveniences, cares, disappointments, and anxieties which befall them, when they shall be persuaded that every individual has his burden laid upon him by God. Hence also will arise peculiar consolation, since there will be no employment so mean and sordid (provided we follow our vocation) as not to appear truly respectable, and be deemed highly important in the sight of God.¹

After the Reformation a Pseudo-Lutheran understanding of vocation arose which degenerated the original to the point where it finally became little more than the justification and sanctification of secular institutions, thereby helping to contribute to the 'Kulturprotestantismus' of Liberalism. Bonhoeffer attempted to return to the original understanding of vocation as he felt Luther meant it. In a lecture he gave to the Confessing Church of Saxony in 1935, Bonhoeffer said,

He (Luther) went out of the monastery not because it was good to live outside. In doing so he brought about no sanctification of the 'justitia civilis'. It was

1. Calvin, John. The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. III, X:6. As quoted in A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. by H. T. Kerr, page 107.

rather the case that he refused to call human life holy in any way. His conception of a worldly life of vocation is a critical view of the world. Luther could cry 'grace alone' because he knew Christ as the one who calls to discipleship.... The way to discipleship is in its final consequences the infinitely comforting way of grace.¹

In his "Zweiter Katechismus-Versuch" (Second Catechism Attempt), written in Finkenwalde in 1936, Bonhoeffer tried to formalize his understanding of vocation as a theological concept. To the question, "Wie kann die Gemeinde im weltlichen Beruf leben?", Bonhoeffer answered,

Der Christ nimmt seine Arbeit dankbar aus Gottes Hand. Er fristet durch sie sein Leben und dient gern seinem Nächsten. Er gehorcht in ihr aber allein seinem Herrn Jesus Christus. Der Christ weiss, dass er nicht durch seine Arbeit, sondern allein durch die Güte Gottes lebt.
I. Thess. 4,11f; 2. Thess. 3,7-12; Mat. 6,26-29.²

By the time Bonhoeffer wrote his book Ethics, the terms

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1. Bonhoeffer, D.. No Rusty Swords.
Page 319.
 2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Gesammelte Schriften, Band 3.
Page 362.
"How should the congregation live in its worldly vocation?"
"The Christian thankfully takes his work from God's hand. Through it he lives his life and gratefully serves his neighbour. He hears in it however only his Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian knows, that he lives not through his work but only through the grace of God."

'vocation' and 'calling' are used almost interchangeably. For Luther 'calling' and 'vocation' were also considered as synonymous.¹ For Bonhoeffer one is called to a Christian life and vocation is the communion in which one stands; however, there appears to be a need to give the term a more specific meaning.

Bonhoeffer develops his own position which opposes that of Catholic theology when he states that a person "...must take up his position against the world in the world; the calling is the place at which the call of Christ is answered, the place at which man lives responsibly".² But Bonhoeffer also opposes the Pseudo-Lutheran understanding of vocation.

Vocation is responsibility and responsibility is a total response of the whole man to the whole of reality; for this very reason there can be no petty and pedantic restricting of one's interests to one's professional duties in the narrowest sense.³

In this way Bonhoeffer enlarged the meaning of the concept of vocation by breaking down the restrictions which have historically characterized it in both the Pseudo-Lutheran and Catholic understanding. Bonhoeffer would agree with Barth's understanding

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1. For a discussion of Luther's understanding of the synonymous relationship between 'calling' and 'vocation' see Martin Luther, ed. by John Dillenberger, page 521.
 2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics. Pages 255, 256.
 3. Ibid... Page 258.

of vocation which was not as limited as the Lutheran, that the Christian's response of belief and obedience to the call of Christ forms, in Barth's words, "...the one, total work that he (the disciple) is called to do".¹ Vocation relates to the totality of man's situation. It cannot be equated with a particular profession or work. However, the locus and meaning of vocation is found within the Church, the actively obedient people of God. It appears, however, that the traditional term 'vocation' was no longer suitable to carry the new freight Bonhoeffer intended.

The questions that remained unanswered with the 'Christ exists as the Church' formula of this early stage of Bonhoeffer's writings are, What of the world outside of the Church? and What of the nature of Christ outside of the Church?. The theological implications for the concept of vocation are obvious and Bonhoeffer did see the necessity of dropping the term; however it had to be replaced by a concept which carried even more meaning than Luther had originally intended, thereby forcing Bonhoeffer to go beyond even Luther.

After the writing of his Ethics the term was no longer suitable to convey the enlarged meaning. Instead, Bonhoeffer broke up the term into its constituent elements. In the Letters and Papers From Prison Bonhoeffer rarely uses the term 'vocation' but prefers to speak of his 'task'. By using the term 'task'

1. Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV/2. Page 607.

the specificity and concrete consequences of a calling are maintained, but the depth of meaning that vocation implied is lost.¹ This is the other constituent element of vocation. Bonhoeffer needed a more general term than 'task' yet with a depth of meaning greater than 'vocation' and one which could adequately encompass his enlarged understanding of discipleship.

SUMMARY

To conclude this section, certain points have been established. Bonhoeffer was concerned primarily with the relationship between Jesus Christ and the modern disciple, but only within and through the forms and structures of the Church. The Church in turn can only be understood from the viewpoint of the Christian Revelation and only once this is established can the Church also be seen as the social institution which it is. As such, 'Christ exists as the Church' demands that the disciple be directed towards the Church, a concrete response to a concrete call. This relationship of the call and response is closely in line with Luther's understanding of vocation, if not that of the Lutheran Church.

While an attempt was made in Bonhoeffer's lectures on Christology to expand this understanding of the relationship between Christ and the disciple in other terms besides those of

1. Bonhoeffer uses the term 'task' more than thirty times in the Letters and Papers From Prison while using the term 'vocation' only once in the earliest of his letters.

the limited ecclesiastical calling, the Church struggle forced him to postpone his explorations and return to his firmly established and legalistic 'Christ exists as the Church' position and the formal concept of 'vocation' which accompanied it. As the Church struggle was coming to a close, however, Bonhoeffer realized that he needed a new understanding of the relationship between Christ and His modern disciple and a new concept to represent that understanding. In a letter of 1932 to his friend, Erwin Sutz, Bonhoeffer asked the questions which he dedicated many years of his life to answering.

Can our Church survive a catastrophe?
 Or will it be all over with us, unless
 we change fundamentally and at once?
 Unless we speak quite differently, live
 quite differently? But how?¹

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Gesammelte Schriften, Band 1.
 Pages 23, 24.

As quoted by M. Bosanquet in The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, page 94.

Chapter II

DISCIPLESHIP AS IMITATIO CHRISTI

During the days of the Church struggle there were certain developments in Bonhoeffer's life and theology which set the stage for his new understanding of the relationship between Christ and His modern disciple which the concept of 'vocation' could not contain. Bonhoeffer was among the first and the few who reacted against the 'Aryan legislation' of 1933 and saw it as a crucial problem in the impending struggle. While other theologians and ministers of the 'Reich Church' sought the theological justification for the Aryan clause, Bonhoeffer exposed the theological absurdity of a purely German Church whose membership was dependent upon biology. Finally Bonhoeffer concluded that he could not remain in a Church that excluded Jews, a conclusion which resulted in his repudiation of the Church which to Bonhoeffer would have been unthinkable a few short months ago.

A new opposition was forming within the Church known as the Pastors Emergency League. This was eventually to grow into the Confessing Synod which became synonymous with protest. The counsel of the Ecumenical Movement supported the Confessing Synod in its struggle against the 'German Christians' and so by implication also against the Nazi regime, but for Bonhoeffer, it was never a political struggle.

The Confessing Church grew out of the Barmen Declaration of 1934 and Bonhoeffer, as a member of the Synod, was forced to concentrate primarily on practical matters concerning the life of the Church. His theological training led him to the problem of the relation of Church and state. While in Sanctorum Communio

Bonhoeffer emphasized the humanity of the Church subject to the same sociological laws as other institutions, now, however, Bonhoeffer emphasized the sanctity of the Church and deemphasized the sociological laws.

Luther had separated Church from state and Lutheranism had subjugated the Church to the power of the state. Bonhoeffer, returning to Luther in his essay "Thy Kingdom Come", attempted to revive this 'Two-Kingdom Doctrine'. He wrote,

The Church limits the state, just as the state limits the Church, and each must remain conscious of this mutual limitation.¹

These words may be seen to reflect Luther rather than the Lutheran tradition, but soon Bonhoeffer would be forced to leave even Luther, whom he 'loved more than anyone', behind.

It was one event in Bonhoeffer's life, more than any other, which led him beyond Luther. In 1934 by order of the National Bishop the theological seminaries and schools of the Confessing Church were ordered closed. Some of the schools ignored the order and in 1935 Bonhoeffer became the director of the Confessing Church Seminary at Finkenwäde. In a sense this illegal seminary, known as the 'Bruderhaus', was a return to monasticism, but Bonhoeffer felt that the times demanded such a move. He did not see it simply as a return, however, it was

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. "Thy Kingdom Come" as translated by J. D. Godsey in Preface to Bonhoeffer, page 40.

also a step forward for both Bonhoeffer and the life of the Church he served.

The restoration of the Church must surely depend on a new kind of monasticism, having nothing in common with the old but a life of uncompromising adherence to the Sermon on the Mount in imitation of Christ.¹

Bonhoeffer was not trying to create a monastic order at Finkenwalde, and, on the contrary, he took care to ensure that what he was doing represented the best traditions of German Protestantism. This meant self-discipline and mutual discipline rather than obedience based upon the authority of a superior.

For the Lutheran Church, communal life had been a dead issue for centuries. Bonhoeffer attempted to rediscover this ancient tradition and he emphasized communal life as preparation for the ministry. Bonhoeffer had visited Anglican monasteries while in England, and saw that such an atmosphere lent itself well to developing firmly committed pastors. Bonhoeffer saw the contrast between this life style and that of his own Church in which the predominant mentality was marked by individualistic piety and the absence of a sense of responsibility for others and the Church.

1. Bonhoeffer, D., from a letter of January 14th, 1935 as quoted by E. Bethge in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, page 380.

Bonhoeffer's book Life Together is largely a record of the activities of the 'Bruderhaus' experiment. While the seminary itself was an attempt to create a strong and dedicated nucleus of disciples, it was also an attempt to create a weapon for the Church struggle. Finkenwalde was not a sanctuary from the world but was primarily concerned with the disciples' responsible behavior towards the world. Bonhoeffer believed that humanity should conform to Christ but at the same time he always stressed 'this-worldliness'. The community was not to be 'other-worldly', but rather, it was an attempt through a Spartan life style to prepare the disciple to face the world with a strong religious and social centre.

To stay in the world with God means simply to live in the rough and tumble of the world and at the same time remain in the body of Christ, the visible Church, to take part in its worship and live the life of discipleship.¹

Using concrete spatial terms, such as 'Christ exists as the Church', Bonhoeffer could demand for the Church a 'living-space'. The great difference between this and the traditional Lutheran understanding of the Church is due to Bonhoeffer's addition of 'the fellowship of men' to the two classical concepts of Word and Sacrament. All three terms merged in Bonhoeffer's organic conception of the Church as the Revelation.

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. The Cost of Discipleship.
Page 233.

Bonhoeffer allowed no escape from the demands of 'concrete' allegiances. He went so far as to repeat Tertullian's 'Extra ecclesiam nulla salus' — 'outside of the (Confessing) Church there is no salvation'.

The duty of the disciple was to reject the influences of Hitler's Germany within the boundaries established by the community of Revelation. Bonhoeffer attempted to return to his position of the days before the Church struggle by reaffirming the call and obedience to the call within the 'Christ exists as the Church' formula. Bonhoeffer could no longer claim a legalistic understanding of the Church. In his lectures on Christology a shift was made from the Church being a determinant of Christ to Christ determining the nature and function of the Church. Now, however, the Church was enlarged to the concept of community, and boundaries had to be maintained between the community and the world in order to preserve a 'living-space' for Christ. Christ and this community were still seen by Bonhoeffer as compatible. The call to discipleship had to be heeded through the forms and structures of the community, which, while not being entirely orthodox, was still recognizable as Christian. Bonhoeffer was later to say of this stage of his life that he thought he could be a disciple "...by trying to live a holy life".¹

One of the developments arising out of this changing

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Letters and Papers From Prison.
Page 369.

ecclesiology was a consequent change in Bonhoeffer's understanding of 'vocation'. The Church was no longer a formal institution and one's vocation could no longer be as rigidly defined as it had been; however, the concrete nature of the call and the unquestioning obedience of the disciple were to remain.

The end of the Finkenwalde experiment also set the stage for a new understanding of discipleship. The ecclesiastical calling which was the basis of vocation was transformed to a call to act responsibly within the community. The disciple must leave the security of the community of Revelation to act for God in the world. This led to an entirely different understanding of the relationship between Christ and His modern disciple; a relationship which could no longer be mediated by the Church.

Karl Barth, in a letter he wrote to Landessuperintendent Herrenbrück in 1952, was the first person to see the questions Bonhoeffer was struggling with at the heart of his theology. Barth wrote,

And what he says about sharing in the suffering of God, and so on, seems to me to be clearly a variation of the 'imitatio' which he rightly stressed.... It has long been clear to me that I will have to devote a lot of room to this matter in the Church Dogmatics. Was it Bonhoeffer's view that the whole of theology must be put on this basis? It

is possible that in his cell he did at times think this.¹

Karl Barth recognized the relationship between the 'imitatio' and the other major themes of Bonhoeffer's writings although he obviously did not, and, considering his own theology, could not have agreed.

There is some proof that Bonhoeffer was indeed working in this area. In a letter he wrote to his friend, Erwin Sutz, from London in 1934, Bonhoeffer asks,

Nachfolge Christi — was das ist,
möchte ich wissen — es ist nicht erschöpft
in unserem Begriff des Glaubens.²

In a letter of December 1943, Bonhoeffer states that he is reading the classic The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis.³ As well, Dietrich's father was a prominent German psychologist and psychology had long ago demonstrated the primary role that imitation plays in the development of the individual and collective personality. Learning, at least during the early

1. Barth, K.. "From a Letter to Landessuperintendent P. W. Herrenbrück, 21 December 1952", in World Come of Age, ed. by R. G. Smith, page 91. Barth never did devote any room to the subject of the 'imitatio' in his Church Dogmatics.

2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Gesammelte Schriften, Band 1. Page 41.

"Imitation of Christ — I'd like to know what that is — it is not exhausted in our concept of faith."

3. In the Letters and Papers From Prison (page 170) Bonhoeffer says he is reading the Imitation of Christ both in the original Latin and in German translation. He goes on to quote from it on page 175. "Custodi diligenter cellam tuam, et custodiet te" (Take good care of your cell, and it will take care of you).

stages of development is based largely on imitation while moral teaching in particular is almost totally a matter of imitation.

These are, however, obviously peripheral points. The place to begin must be at the historical beginnings of the concept of the 'imitatio'. In the following section of this paper, an attempt will be made to give a brief though highly stylized history of the concept of the 'imitatio' in order to show how it has traditionally been used and how Bonhoeffer fits into this ancient tradition.

In the Cultic practices of the ancient religions, the imitation of God was seen as a form of sympathetic magic. The actions of the members, though symbolic, were intended to create corresponding realities. For example, the ritual of spraying water on the soil was meant to be accompanied by a rain from the gods. There was a corresponding relationship with the gods through 'mimesis'.¹

This idea of the 'imitatio Dei' was also preserved in the Hellenic 'mystery religions'; however, the imitation was more a mystical ideal and was practiced only by the chosen few. It was held that the disciple mimed and thereby participated in the life of the gods. The philosophical intellectualization of the gods as ideal forms by Plato, however, made of the gods an other-worldly ideal. 'Mimesis' in Greek thought is also the

1. According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 'mimesis' in the original Greek was actually a biological term.

key to ethical norms. Imitation of the virtues of the gods was an ethical ideal. Man must imitate the divine stability of the universe. Through the study of mathematics and astronomy, humanity grasps the idea of cosmic harmony and law. This 'cosmic law' evolved into the 'natural law' of the Stoics and 'right action' meant living in accordance with, or imitating this law. Revealed law thus became equated with natural law.¹

In the Hebraic tradition, on the other hand, the imitation of God was seen as a dynamic imitation which demanded the entire life of not only the disciple but of all the people. The Exodus out of Egypt was a worldly imitation of the God who in the Old Testament is known as 'the way'. The distinctive feature of this 'imitatio Dei' was its worldliness. God is revealed through a series of events and the chosen people followed that same series to the promised land. That is 'the way' of the Lord. Torah means literally 'the signpost along the way'. Sin is 'turning aside from the way', and repentance is 'turning back into the way'. This shows a dynamic movement and process as opposed to the static contemplation of an ideal as held by the Greeks. The 'way' implies not only a direction, but also 'the way God wants us to act'. In other words, 'the way' contains not only the content of Revelation (the Ten Commandments) but also the method of Revelation (Exodus), neither of which can

1. This is obviously an oversimplification. For further elaboration of this point, see J. Shiel, Greek Thought and the Rise of Christianity, pages 83-86.

be separated from the other.¹.

Jesus too can be seen as 'the Way', and he too followed the way of the 'imitatio Dei' of Israel. From the Judaic understanding of 'the way' it was only natural for Christ and the disciples to use the vocabulary of 'following'. He was often compelled to do something within certain time limits or at certain places. For example, he had to go to Jerusalem. Events had to follow a certain course, the Spirit was showing the way.

E. J. Tinsley, in his book The Imitation of God in Christ, states what he feels is the relation of Jesus to the Old Testament understanding of God as 'the way'.

The mission of Jesus was to fulfill an historical task: to walk himself in the 'Way of Israel' and thereby express his sonship in terms applicable to the situation to which he came. In action and in word Jesus willed to mime the significant features of his nation's history. The form of the ministry of Jesus was an extended act of prophetic symbolism. Jesus was himself the 'Way' and therefore the perfect imitator of the Father. Perception of his mission as a 'sign' and decision to act upon it

1. The imitation of 'the way' is also a basic feature of Chinese Taoism. (Tao means 'the way'.) Buddha also initiated an 'eightfold way' by which the disciple could reach perfection. In Hinduism 'the way' is station oriented rather than action oriented. 'The way' is determined by one's dharma or station in life which provides the possibilities and limitations of an action.

was a matter for which those confronted with it were accountable.¹

By the same token we as disciples are to imitate Christ. The New Testament roots of the 'imitatio Christi' are seen to be Christ himself who often said to his disciples 'Follow me'. (Matt. 19:28, Mark 1:17, 2:14, 8:34, 10:21) By this it is implied that Jesus Christ is not only the method but also the content of Revelation. The Christian in following Christ is also asked to follow him to the cross (Luke 9:23). The theme of following after Jesus as described in the Gospels should never be identified solely with the particular vocation of a few disciples. It is much richer in meaning implying a sharing of one's life with Jesus.² In the Gospels one notices a profound distinction in language. While those disciples who knew Jesus 'in the flesh' speak of 'following', Paul, who lived by faith, uses the vocabulary of the 'imitatio'. Paul develops the theme of the 'imitatio' in conjunction with a more basic theme, namely the union of Christ and the faithful as expressed by the term 'in Christo', a phrase which carries more weight than does 'to follow'. Paul continuously speaks of 'knowing'

1. Tinsley, E. J.. The Imitation of God in Christ.
Page 72.

2. / Anselm Shulz in Junger des Herrn attempts to show that 'to follow' has five different meanings or connotations as it is used in the Gospels:

- (A) physical accompaniment (Luke 14:27; Mark 8:34)
- (B) obligation of the disciple (Mark 1:17; Matt. 19:28)
- (C) sharing a common destiny (John 12:26, 13:36; Rev. 14:4)
- (D) to believe (John 8:12, 10:4-5 and 27)
- (E) a moral imitation (Luke 14:27; Mark 8:34; I Peter 2:21)

and 'becoming like' Christ. In Philipians 3:10-11, for example, Paul states that he desires "...to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death". The 'imitatio Christi' must indeed, therefore, be seen as a biblical theme.¹

In the patristic period of Christian history the 'imitatio Christi' was the driving force behind the practices of celibacy and virginity.² Since the cross is the central symbol of the Christian faith it also was only natural that early Christian writers wrote particularly of martyrs as the ideal imitators of Christ. Ignatius of Antioch in the first century wrote a letter to the Romans asking of them, "Permit me to be an imitator of my suffering God".³ John Chrysostom in the fourth century had much to say concerning the 'imitatio Christi'.

You are a Christian in order to imitate Christ and obey His commands. Look then to Him who is the perfect model.⁴

In order to exhort His disciples to

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1. This point is made and developed by the Biblical scholar H. C. Waetjan in the essay "Is the 'Imitation of Christ' Biblical?" in Dialog, Vol. II No. 2 Spring 1963, page 125.
 2. For an excellent contextual understanding of these practices see B. Z. Goldberg, Sex in Religion, pages 229 - 275, and "On Imitating Jesus" in E. Phipps, The Sexuality of Jesus.
 3. Ignatius of Antioch, The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch, page 83 as quoted in Imitating Christ, ed. by E. J. Malatesta S. J., page 39.
 4. Ibid., Chrysostom, J.. Against the Jews 8.9, page 40.

great things, our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself as an example.¹

May Christ never cease making Himself known in us. How will He make Himself known? By the actions we perform in imitation of Him.²

Augustine was later to say that the concept of 'walking in His footsteps' implicitly contains the 'imitatio Christi'; "For what is it to follow Him except to imitate Him".³ In fact "...the gist of religion is imitation of Him who is worshipped".⁴

Christianity had concentrated its focus primarily on the glory of the resurrection rather than the suffering that preceded it. Then the Crusades changed Christendom's perspective by restoring the vision of the historical Christ who had suffered for sinful man. In a world which was now both religiously and politically Christian and which could consequently no longer claim persecution, the gaze of the Church was turned both outward and inward. Outward was the challenge of the recapture of the Holy Land while inward, the imitation of Christ took Christians to the monastery with its practices and vows of self-denial which allowed men to imitate Christ without worldly

1. Chrysostom, J.. Homilies on Philipians 6.1, as quoted in Imitating Christ, ed. by E. J. Malatesta S. J., page 41.

2. Ibid., Chrysostom, J.. Homilies on Romans 24.4., page 41.

3. Ibid., Augustine, St.. Holy Virginity, page 79.

4. Augustine, St.. De Civitate Dei VIII, 17.

distractions.

In the twelfth century Bernard of Clairvaux believed that the imitation of Christ was central to faith itself. In his words, "I do not see Christ as accessible only to my prayers but I dare even to imitate Him".¹ And later, "When finally I believed in Christ, that is to say when I imitated His humility, I came to know Truth".²

A romanticized concern to imitate Christ without the natural counterweight which persecution had provided led to a contempt for worldly life and the body and finally led to the perversions of self-inflicted suffering for the sake of a metaphysical ideal. Thomas a Kempis in The Imitation of Christ was to say,

Endeavour therefore to withdraw thy
heart from the love of visible things
and turn thyself to the invisible.³

It was not merely a case of suffering for the sake of suffering but God would also reward the true imitators, at least according to a Kempis. In his words,

If thou continuest faithful and
fervent in thy work, no doubt but God

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1. Bernard, St.. On the Song of Songs, Vol. I.
Page 496.
 2. Bernard, St.. The Steps of Humility.
Page 151.
 3. Thomas a Kempis. The Imitation of Christ.
Book I, Chapter 1, 5.

will be faithful and liberal in rewarding you.¹.

Protestants have on the whole rejected the Christian life as drawn by a Kempis. James Gustafson says of the Jesus portrayed by a Kempis, that the Christ "...who is imitated is hardly one we recognize in the Gospels or the rest of the New Testament". In the image of perfection projected by a Kempis, Gustafson continues, there is "...a false cleavage between the realm of the spirit—peace, true joy, the soul, all that is good; and the realm of the flesh—passions, senses, the 'world', and all that is evil".².

Despite Protestant criticism the 'imitatio Christi' is still an integral aspect of Catholic theology today, particularly in the area of 'intercession'. To aid the Christian in imitating

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1. Thomas a Kempis. The Imitation of Christ. Book III, Chapter XXV, 1.

To again illustrate the close historical relationship between 'following' and 'imitation', it is interesting to note that an early sixteenth century English translation by Richard Whitford of The Imitation of Christ was entitled The Folowyng of Chryste —see E. J. Kleins' Introduction to the 1941 Harpers' edition of The Imitation of Christ (p.32). It is also interesting to note that the German translation of The Imitation of Christ is Nachfolge Christi and even more interesting is the fact that the German title of Bonhoeffer's Cost of Discipleship is simply Nachfolge. 'Nachfolge' has no precise English equivalent. It may be translated as 'discipleship' but this can suggest merely the adherence to a master's teachings or an acceptance of his philosophy. 'Nachfolge' can also be translated as 'successor'. 'Imitation' is perhaps a closer translation than either of these as I will attempt to show. 'Imitation' alone encompasses the dynamism of the German 'Nachfolge'.

2. Gustafson, J.. Christ and the Moral Life. Page 68.

Christ, the Church sets before him Saints which have followed the way of Christ and were apparently more successful than most in their imitation of Christ. By their example and intercession the Christian will become through grace and works what Jesus is by nature. In fact, until the Reformation, the 'imitatio Christi' had been the distinctive motif of Christian behaviour.

Luther was critical of the 'imitatio Christi' for several reasons. He felt that it inevitably led to a doctrine of works, a literalism and mysticism. Luther argued that action which aims at reward, even salvation, is precisely the opposite of the sort of action for which reward is promised. Therefore he counsels "...if you wish to pray, fast, or establish some foundation in the Church, take heed not to do it in order to obtain some benefit, whether temporal or eternal".¹ Luther preferred to break up the term and use concepts such as 'vocation' and 'conformitas' instead, so as to avoid the excesses of the medieval Church. Although Luther changed its form, the 'imitatio Christi' can still be seen to exist within Protestant theology. For example, Luther did admonish that "...each should become as it were a Christ to the other, that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all; that is, that we may be truly Christians".²

1. Luther, Martin. Works, Vol. II, page 342 as quoted in P. Ramsey's Basic Christian Ethics, page 135.

2. Luther, M.. Three Treatises.
Page 279.

Calvin, like Luther, also preferred to use 'conformitas' but the intended meaning is clear; we should also follow in 'the way' of Christ. Calvin said in his Institutes of the Christian Religion,

With what better foundation can it begin, than when it (Scriptures) admonishes that we ought to be holy because our God is holy.... And as a further incitement to us, it shows, that as God the father has reconciled us to himself in Christ, so he has exhibited to us in him a pattern, to which it is his will that we should be conformed.¹

In light of the emphasis on the future life which dominates Calvin's theology, the glory of Christ is stressed. In opposition to the romantic understanding of suffering as we find in the medieval 'imitatio Christi', however, Calvin stressed the 'real' suffering of Christ and our participation in that suffering.

The more we are afflicted and endure miseries, so much the more certainly is our association with Christ confirmed.²

Calvin did not, however, introduce a doctrine of works as the above quotation might imply. In his words,

No person ought to be held to be

1. Calvin, John. The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III, VI;3, as quoted in A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. by H. T. Kerr, page 62.

2. Ibid., Book III, VIII;1, page 82.

disciples of Christ, unless it be those who are his real imitators and ready to run the course that he did. But he gives us, in brief, the rule for this imitation, so that we may know in what thing he chiefly wishes us to be like him. It consists of two points: namely, the renunciation of ourselves, and the voluntary suffering of the cross.¹

The concept of the imitation of Christ began to fall more and more out of Protestant theological language after the Reformation. John Wesley selected portions of Thomas a Kempis' Imitation of Christ and published it under the title of The Christian Pattern. Philip Jacob Spener and the German Pietist movement attempted a sort of revival but, in this area at least, they had little impact on the milieu of Protestant thought. In the nineteenth century, however, there appears to be a revival of the 'imitatio Christi'. Søren Kierkegaard, in a rather lengthy discourse on "Christ as Example", compares his own age to that of the Reformation and consequently calls for a revitalization of the concept of the 'imitatio'.

However great (the Middle Ages') errors may have been, its conception of Christianity has a decisive superiority over that of our time. The Middle Ages conceived of Christianity with a view to action, life,

1. Calvin, John. The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III, XLV; 481, page 157, as quoted in A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. by H. T. Kerr.

the transformation of personal existence. This is its valuable side. It is another matter that there were some singular actions they especially emphasized, that they could think that fasting for its own sake was Christianity, and so too going into a monastery, bestowing everything upon the poor, not to speak of what we can hardly refer to without smiling, such as flagellation, crawling on the knees, standing upon one leg, etc., as if this were the true imitation of Christ. This was error.... What was worse than the first error did not fail to make its appearance, that they got the idea of meritoriousness, thought that they acquired merit before God by their good works. And the situation became worse than this: they even thought that by good works one might acquire merit to such a degree that it accrued not only to his advantage, but that like a capitalist or bondsman one might let it accrue to the advantage of others. And it became worse, it became a regular business.... Then Luther came forward.... But let us not forget that for all this Luther did not do away with the following of Christ, nor with voluntary imitation, as the effeminate coterie is so fain to make us believe.... The erroneous path from which Luther turned off was exaggeration with respect to works. And quite rightly, he was not at fault: a man is justified solely and only by faith.... But already the next generation slackened; it did not turn in horror from exaggeration

in respect to works (of which Luther had had personal experience) into the path of faith. No, they transformed the Lutheran passion into a doctrine, and with this they diminished also the vital power of faith.... When the monastery is the misleading thing, faith must be introduced; when the 'professor' is the misleading thing, imitation must be introduced.... The 'disciple' is the standard: imitation and Christ as the Pattern must be introduced.¹

Kierkegaard's influence, however, was not felt in the theological world until the twentieth century, long after his death. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, other theologians such as Adolph von Harnack, Walter Rauschenbusch and Albert Schweitzer also attempted a sort of revival of the 'imitatio', in their lives if not explicitly within their writings. They were concerned with finding Christ in order to follow him through a form of participation in his being. Rather than withdraw from society as was the usual custom, they attempted to change society, Schweitzer in the African jungle and Rauschenbusch in America.

This is the tradition and theological climate within which Bonhoeffer found himself. Bonhoeffer is the only modern dialectical theologian who revolted against Liberal Protestantism

1. Kierkegaard, S.. "Christ as Example" (Discourse 2) in Judge for Yourself, pages 201, 202, 205 and 207.

and yet, as Karl Barth pointed out, also attempted to reestablish a form of the 'imitatio'. Barth was wrong, however, in believing that it was only in his cell that Bonhoeffer 'did at times think this'. In an exegetical lecture he gave in 1932, before he was forced into a legalistic interpretation of his 'Christ exists as the Church' position, Bonhoeffer said of the 'imitatio Christi',

Und noch paradoxer bei Paulus: Er möchte von Gott verflucht und von Christus geschieden sein seinen Brüdern zugut (Röm.9). Rätselhaft genug dieses Wort im Munde eines Mannes, der die Gemeinschaft mit Gott mehr liebt als alles andere! Es ist kein Augenblick der Schwäche, sondern letzte Erfüllung des Gebotes Christi, das ganze Hingabe für den Nächsten erwartet. Weil Paulus sich verbannt wünscht um der Brüder willen, bleibt er in tiefster Gemeinschaft mit dem Willen Gottes. Das ist imitatio Christi.¹

The interim years of Bonhoeffer's life were dominated by the Church struggle and it was not until The Cost of Discipleship

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1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Gesammelte Schriften, Band 5. Page 265.

"And still more paradoxical in Paul: he was willing to be damned by God and separated from Christ for the betterment of his brethren (Rom. 9). These words from the mouth of a man, who loved God more than all else, is puzzling enough! He did not for a moment weaken, but rather fulfilled the last command of Christ, to completely devote himself to his neighbour. Because Paul wished to be exiled for the sake of his brethren, he remains in deepest community with the will of God. That is the imitatio Christi."

that we become aware that Bonhoeffer is attempting to present a Protestant 'imitatio Christi' as the new basis of his theology. The Cost of Discipleship was the summation of both Bonhoeffer's life and thought up to that time. In it he combined the three major trends of his thought, namely the Christology from his lectures, the ecclesiology from his earliest works and the theme of concrete obedience which emerged from his works on Biblical exegesis. This new work was largely devotional in tone and character and so the importance of certain phrases and concepts often becomes lost in the terminology. Given the advantage of hindsight, however, the significance of the work to the development of Bonhoeffer's theology is clearly revealed. The clearest example of the 'imitatio' can be found in the following passage;

Now we can understand why the New Testament always speaks of our becoming 'like Christ' (kathos Christos). We have been transformed into the image of Christ, and are therefore destined to be like him. He is the only 'pattern' we must follow. And because he really lives his life in us, we too can 'walk even as he walked' (1 John 2:6), and 'do as he has done' (John 13:15), 'love as he has loved' (Eph. 5:2; John 13:34; 15:12), 'forgive as he forgave' (Col. 3:13), 'have this mind, which was also in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:5), and therefore we are able to follow the example he has left us (1 Peter 2:21), lay down our lives for the brethren as he did

(1 John 3:16). It is only because he became like us that we can become like him. It is only because we are identified with him that we can become like him. Now at last deeds are performed and life is lived in single minded discipleship to the image of Christ and his words find unquestioning obedience.¹

The most important of the themes here established is that of 'obedience' to Christ.² While Bonhoeffer's Christology changed and evolved throughout his life, 'single minded obedience' remained a 'cantus firmus' or a constant basis for the disciples' relationship with Jesus Christ. As such, Bonhoeffer did not need a particular Christology or a life of Jesus upon which to model his life. And, as stated previously, this is in fact inimical to the concept of obedience.³

Whether Bonhoeffer's Christology was based on the Cross, Resurrection or Incarnation therefore becomes of secondary importance. While not entirely attempting to sidestep the Christology issue, it must be remembered that for Bonhoeffer the question was always 'Who art thou Lord?', rather than the 'godless questions' of the 'what' and the 'how' of Christ.

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. The Cost of Discipleship.
Page 274.

2. The understanding of 'obedience' is central to understanding Bonhoeffer's ethical thought and it will be discussed in detail in the last chapter of this paper.

3. See page 10.

Jesus calls the disciples to follow him, but it is only through their following that they understand who Christ really is. In Mark 2:14 we read,

And as he passed by he saw Levi,
the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the
place of toll, and he saith unto him,
Follow me. And he arose and followed
him.

Bonhoeffer's exegesis of this passage led him to conclude that,

The call goes forth, and is at once
followed by the response of obedience.
The response of the disciple is an act
of obedience, not a confession of faith
in Jesus.¹

To take this one step further, Bonhoeffer states that, "...only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes...we must never lose sight of their essential unity. For faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience".² If the first half of the proposition were to stand alone, the disciple would be exposed to the danger of 'cheap grace', for

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1. Bonhoeffer, D.. The Cost of Discipleship.
Page 48.

Like Bonhoeffer, Søren Kierkegaard also stressed 'concrete obedience'. For S. K. the would-be Christian must shape his own life within day-to-day existence. Discipleship must be expressed "...not with words and chit-chat, bombastic prose or sounding verses, but in the action of absolute obedience." (The Last Years, page 289) as quoted in B. R. Dewey, The New Obedience: Kierkegaard on Imitating Christ, page 140.

2. Ibid., page 54.

faith can only be an abstract belief if divorced from obedience. If the second half were to stand alone, the disciple would be exposed to the danger of a doctrine of salvation through works. In the medieval tradition the 'imitatio' was the basis of a program of spiritual growth based on works. This however is what Luther objected to and is also what Bonhoeffer is rejecting. By this formula Bonhoeffer has separated his understanding of the 'imitatio' from that of traditional Catholic theology.

Since Holl first introduced him to Luther, Bonhoeffer has remained in the framework set by Luther. His debt to Luther is reaffirmed in The Cost of Discipleship but Bonhoeffer also takes a new approach. Luther had said that through faith alone is man saved. In these pages Bonhoeffer shows that through the Church struggle he has learned that Christ demands more than this. The imitation of Christ is not a substitute for faith but, to paraphrase Bonhoeffer, 'when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die'.

To see this statement as allegorical or as a psychologically oriented statement as many have done would be to do a disservice to Bonhoeffer's thought. One can clearly see that Bonhoeffer is emphasizing a concrete call and a concrete response, a theological position that his life had led him to. This is the basis of the distinction between 'cheap' and 'costly' grace. Bonhoeffer sees 'cheap' grace as robbing discipleship of its meaning. 'Cheap' grace means grace as a doctrine, as a principle or a system, while 'costly' grace, on the other

hand, "...must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock".¹ Cheap grace offers forgiveness without repentance, communion without confession and entrance into the Christian life without true discipleship. Essentially Bonhoeffer is rejecting an understanding of discipleship which has degenerated into religiosity through adherence to merely a 'principle' of obedience. The true disciple must place himself within 'concrete' obedience. Bonhoeffer is not challenging Luther's dictum 'sola fide' nor is he attempting to redefine justification; however, he is attempting a new theological formulation which will give Lutherans a basis for action.

Bonhoeffer's theology of obedience and his emphasis upon the concrete becomes a theology of action meant to counter traditional Lutheran passivity. It is when the disciple enters this realm of action that grace becomes costly. The Confessing Church struggle obviously underlies this theological shift away from Luther and this same struggle underlines the validity of Bonhoeffer's theology. We must agree with Mary Bosanquet who said of Bonhoeffer's theology that it is "...no product of a professor's peaceful study. It comes to us red-hot out of a cauldron which boiled with agonizing decisions, decisions which could mean life or death for the body and salvation or damnation for the soul".²

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. The Cost of Discipleship.
Page 47.

2. Bosanquet, M.. The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
Page 220.

One of the traditional Catholic themes of the 'imitatio Christi' does remain. This is the theme of suffering.

Our God is a suffering God. Suffering forms man into the image of God. The suffering man is in the likeness of God.... Whenever a man in the position of weakness — physical or social or moral or religious weakness — is aware of his existence with God and his likeness to God, he shares God's life.¹

It is in his Christology that Bonhoeffer's Lutheran roots are clearly revealed. Christ is seen not primarily as a historical person, but in the tradition of Luther and the 'theologia crucis', Christ is seen in light of the Ascension. Until the Kingdom has arrived, the suffering Christ must be seen as a present reality and not merely as a figure out of the past. Kierkegaard believed that a Christian can expect to be persecuted as was Jesus, to the point of "...being crucified alongside of him".² Bonhoeffer always speaks of Christ as a person, a structure of reality and even as a place but rarely ever as a past event. Sharing in Christ's suffering is not something the disciple does, or something that happens to him, but rather, for Bonhoeffer, it is inextricably interwoven in the meaning of discipleship itself. The 'imitatio Christi' cannot therefore

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Gesammelte Schriften, Band 4.
Page 182.

The English translation is Bonhoeffer's own.

2. Kierkegaard, S.. Training in Christianity.
Page 171.

become a doctrine of works and it also cannot slip into the masochistic extremes which characterized it in medieval thought. As well, the free acceptance of one's lot in life cannot be taken to the fatalistic and self-defeating extremes which have plagued that belief in Lutheran thought. Bonhoeffer has removed the romantic and self-righteous as well as the self-pitying overtones which have traditionally accompanied the understanding of the redemptive act of suffering. The disciple cannot earn the transformation which suffering creates but rather he can only respond. In Bonhoeffer's words,

We cannot transform ourselves into his image, it is rather the form of Christ which seeks to be formed in us.¹

It is perhaps inevitable that Bonhoeffer's existential tendencies be discussed at this point. Bonhoeffer had never consciously attempted to go beyond Luther and in fact he felt he had not. Bonhoeffer believed, as did Søren Kierkegaard, that Luther would have said and done something else if he were alive today, and yet he would still be affirming the same reality. In his words,

If Luther were alive today he would have said the exact opposite of what he said in the sixteenth century.²

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. The Cost of Discipleship.
Page 272.

2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Letters and Papers From Prison.
Page 123.

This 'situational' understanding can be traced throughout Lutheran history by examining the attitudes Luther, Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer had towards marriage. Luther, a celibate monk, married while Kierkegaard, coming from a state religion which supported marriage, refused to marry Regina Olsen and yet felt that in so doing he was affirming the same reality as had Luther. Whether Bonhoeffer did not marry Maria von Wedemeyer due to choice or circumstance will probably not be resolved until his letters to his fiancé are released.¹

Bonhoeffer never directly mentions his debt to Søren Kierkegaard but as the following lines suggest, he thought very highly of him.

Here we stand on an entirely different and new point of departure to the whole problem. We stand in the tradition of Paul, Luther, Kierkegaard, in the tradition of genuine Christian thinking.²

John Macquarrie said of Bonhoeffer's The Cost of Discipleship that it is "...reminiscent of Kierkegaard".³ Traces of

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1. These letters have been deposited in the Houghton Library (Harvard) but are not available to the public. Some theological excerpts have been published by Maria von Wedemeyer-Weller in "The Other Letters From Prison", Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. XXIII, No. 1 Fall 1967. Parts of this essay are reprinted in the "Appendix" of the Letters and Papers From Prison and also in Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age, ed. by P. Vorkink.
 2. Bonhoeffer, D.. No Rusty Swords. Page 362.
 3. Macquarrie, J.. Twentieth Century Religious Thought. Page 331.

existential thought keep recurring in Bonhoeffer's theology and often at very crucial times. It can in fact be seen as a dominant feature underlying The Cost of Discipleship and the theme of the 'imitatio Christi'. This is not an aspect of either Bonhoeffer's or Kierkegaard's theology which is currently drawing interest but perhaps it should be.

There is a great similarity between Bonhoeffer's and Kierkegaard's understanding of the 'imitatio Christi'.¹ For example, Kierkegaard said,

Christ's life here upon earth is the paradigm; it is in likeness to it that I along with every Christian must try to construct my life.²

and furthermore,

'Imitation', 'the following of Christ', this precisely is the point where the human race winces, here it is principally that the difficulty lies, here is where the question really is decided whether one will accept Christianity or not.³

Kierkegaard came to accept the 'imitatio Christi' despite his

1. The Danish 'Efterfølgelse' has the exact same meaning and connotation as the German 'Nachfolge' — for a discussion of 'Nachfolge' see Footnote 1, page 47, — for a discussion of Kierkegaard's understanding of the 'imitatio' see The New Obedience: Kierkegaard on Imitating Christ by B. R. Dewey, and Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship by V. Eller.

2. Kierkegaard, S.. Training in Christianity. Page 109.

3. Kierkegaard, S.. "Christ as Example" (Discourse 2) in Judge for Yourself, page 197.

traditional Lutheran inclinations. Kierkegaard carefully avoided making the 'imitatio' a means of obtaining merit, but he was equally careful to preserve the demands he felt are included in the concept of discipleship. Kierkegaard intended that imitation be authentic, involving a 'true identity relationship' between the Christian and Christ and not merely a copy.¹ According to Kierkegaard there are, however, limits to the 'imitatio'.

It is not enough to say that Christ is the model and we only need imitate Him. In the first place, I need His assistance in order to be like Him; and in the second place, inasmuch as He is the Saviour and the Redeemer of humanity, I assuredly cannot imitate Him.²

Bonhoeffer's understanding of the 'imitatio Christi' is based in part upon a devotional existential method of exegesis whereby the distinction between Christ and the disciple is overcome through the mediation of Christ in the disciple's confrontation with the Scriptural Word. Since the Gospels describe not only past events but are also grounded in mystery, the contemplation of the Word cannot be seen as an attempt to capture the past in order to replay scenes written ages ago.

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1. This point is especially well made in the article "Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Imitation" by Marie Thulstrup in A Kierkegaard Critique, ed. by N. Thulstrup and H. A. Johnson.
 2. Kierkegaard, S.. The Journals, as quoted in V. Eller, Kierkegaard and Radical Discipleship, page 391.

Through the Word and through the faith of the disciple, Christ takes form and transforms the individual. The call to obedience is clear and concrete.

The way is unutterably hard, and at every moment we are in danger of straying from it. If we regard this way as one we follow in obedience to an external command, if we are afraid of ourselves all the time, it is indeed an impossible way. But if we behold Jesus Christ going on before step by step, we shall not go astray. But if we worry about the dangers that beset us, if we gaze at the road instead of him who goes before, we are already straying from the path. For he is himself the way, the narrow way and the straight gate.¹

We can see that because of this personal relationship with Jesus Christ that Bonhoeffer is stressing, he has potentially undercut his 'Christ exists as the Church' position. Discipleship is personal commitment, but individual discipleship and 'individualism' must be seen as mutually exclusive. This emphasis upon the individual disciple remained throughout Bonhoeffer's life. When Jesus calls the individual to a responsible life, he can no longer seek safety in numbers. By emphasizing the disciple's personal relationship to Jesus Christ, the 'community of Revelation' is no longer the only

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. The Cost of Discipleship.
Page 170.

means by which the disciple can live and respond to the call.

There were certain events in Bonhoeffer's life which helped to bring this change in perspective about. In 1937 the community of Finkenwalde was closed by the Gestapo and the boundaries Bonhoeffer had attempted to maintain were forcibly torn down. Bonhoeffer had watched the decline of the Christian community in Germany and he himself was now hemmed in by restrictions. Since his radio speech on the "Leadership Principle" in 1933, he had come to public attention. He could no longer preach, teach or publish and was ordered to report regularly to the police.

The call to discipleship, however, remained clear but had now to be answered through other forms and structures. Bonhoeffer joined a conspiracy to overthrow the government and finally to assassinate Hitler. His book, Ethics, written during this time, reflects this change in his life. The relationship between Christ and the disciple is again the basic theme of this book. The problems Bonhoeffer faced in the Ethics deal primarily with the new role of Christ, the Christ that is no longer determined solely by the Church. If Christ is therefore 'inclusive', then what is to prevent 'cheap grace' which Bonhoeffer had argued against in The Cost of Discipleship? It was the other edge of the sword that was the sharpest in Bonhoeffer's case. If Christ exists outside of the Church as well as within the Church, where then can one meet Christ?

It is at this point that Bonhoeffer's ethics become

truly theological. All of these theological influences are brought together in one paragraph at the beginning of his Ethics.

Whoever sees Jesus Christ does indeed see God and the world in one. He can henceforward no longer see God without the world or the world without God.¹

Bonhoeffer's Confessing Church had been denied a 'space' in the world and due to his 'Christ exists as the Church' position, Christ was therefore also denied a 'space'. Now Christ is no longer linked exclusively to ecclesiology. Bonhoeffer's preoccupation with defending a 'space' has now changed to allowing Christ to 'take form' in the world. This is not to say that the Church is no longer a valid 'form' of Christ; it is not an either/or position, but rather the legalistic barriers are removed and the Church becomes simply 'a section of humanity in which Christ has taken form'. The 'space' Bonhoeffer had fought for so long has been surrendered.

The only way in which the Church can defend her own territory is by fighting, not for it, but for the salvation of the world. Otherwise the Church becomes a 'religious society' which fights in its own interests and thereby ceases at once to be the Church of God and of the world.²

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 8.

2. Ibid., Page 69.

Bonhoeffer attempted to return to Luther at this time by reviving the concept of the 'mandates' or 'orders of preservation'. Labour, the family, government and Church limit and support each other and through them all Christ becomes concrete within the world. Whereas previously the Christian's duty had clearly been to reject the world outside of the Church, now the Christian's duty was to accept the new realities and to work within these worldly structures and make them conform to the form of Christ. These four mandates Bonhoeffer sees as 'divine' but "...only by virtue of their original and final relation to Christ. In detachment from this relation, 'in themselves', they are no more divine than the world 'in itself' is divine".¹ The mandates of Bonhoeffer's Ethics appear to be an experiment² and an attempt to create a theological basis for resistance as was his 'two-kingdom' doctrine of the early days of the Church struggle. These were doomed to failure because of their formality which conflicted with the situationalist emphasis of Bonhoeffer's ethics and his emphasis upon the Lordship of Christ.

It is in the Ethics that the various aspects or facets of Bonhoeffer's Protestant 'imitatio Christi' are clearly

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics. Pages 207, 208.

2. At one point in his Ethics (page 207) Bonhoeffer names four mandates. At another time (page 286) he substitutes one for another while at yet another time (Letters and Papers From Prison, page 104) he wonders if 'friendship' belongs, and later (page 192) if 'culture and education' should not also be added.

revealed. Although Bonhoeffer's view of the world changed radically during this period, the basic theme of the 'imitatio' remained the same. In The Cost of Discipleship Bonhoeffer stated,

We shall be drawn into his image,
and identified with his form, and become
a reflection of him.... Our life will
then be...in even closer conformity with
the image of the Son of God.¹

This line of thought is repeated and expanded in the Ethics. To the vocabulary established in The Cost of Discipleship, which so far has included 'conformation', 'transformation', 'assimilation' and 'identification', are added the terms 'adherence', 'participation', 'sharing' and 'formation'. These are the different but basic aspects of Bonhoeffer's 'imitatio Christi'. All see the same dialectical process from a slightly different perspective, yet all affirm the same reality. To take the most important of these concepts,

It is not a question of applying directly to the world the teaching of Christ or what are referred to as Christian principles, so that the world might be formed in accordance with these. On the contrary, formation comes only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ. It comes only as formation in his likeness, as conformation with the unique

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. The Cost of Discipleship.
Page 273.

form of him who was made man, was crucified and rose again.¹

While 'formation comes by being drawn into the form of Christ', the corresponding reality within the disciple is a 'transformation' of his being. A further explanation of this process is offered by Bonhoeffer in the following passage,

The form of Jesus Christ takes form in man. Man does not take on an independent form of his own, but what gives him form and what maintains him in the new form is solely the form of Jesus Christ Himself. It is therefore not a vain imitation or repetition of Christ's form but Christ's form itself which takes form in man. And again, man is not transformed into a form which is alien to him, the form of God, but into his own form, the form which is essentially proper to him. Man becomes man because God became man. But man does not become God.²

We now turn to the final chapter of Bonhoeffer's life. In April of 1943, he was arrested, interrogated, put on trial and finally on April 9th, 1945, after two years in prison, was executed. It was in letters and papers written during this period that Bonhoeffer's mature work finds form.

It was in prison, oddly enough, that the 'boundaries'

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 80.

2. Ibid., Page 82.

Bonhoeffer had created and defended for so long disappeared. With the disappearance of these boundaries came the call to involve oneself with the world, even though the world was now a secular world, and by Bonhoeffer's earlier definitions, 'godless'. For the first time Bonhoeffer did not concern himself with legalistic and arbitrarily devised boundaries as had been the case in the Ethics. The disappearance of the boundaries also led to a rejection of the 'spatial' terminology which had been a characteristic of Bonhoeffer's theology from the start. He no longer found it necessary to use such phrases as 'Christ exists as the Church' or his call for 'a living space for Christ' which had previously been the source of his theological strength. In fact, we now find Bonhoeffer speaking of a 'religionless Christianity' and 'a world come of age'.

Because of the change in language, the use of new concepts and due to his personal situation, there is clearly a difference between this stage and the other stages of Bonhoeffer's life. In prison, Bonhoeffer was forced to re-evaluate all of his former thoughts. His thought concerning discipleship was modified, enlarged, deepened and strengthened but as his friend, Eberhard Bethge, pointed out, there is a great deal that this stage has in common with the others and "...many elements of continuity with the past can be traced, even with The Cost of Discipleship. Both the latter and Letters and Papers From Prison end in a remarkably similar way with the

motif of 'imitatio' ".¹.

Discipleship, particularly as 'imitatio Christi', is clearly a perspective from which we can view the prison letters in a balanced theological framework. It is important that Bonhoeffer's understanding of 'religionless Christianity' be held together with his understanding of discipleship. Otherwise, it may be understood that Bonhoeffer advocated the secularization of the Gospel in a perverted sense as the German Christians had done, namely a Christianity suited to the times.

To understand what Bonhoeffer means by 'religionless', we must first of all look at what he means by 'religion'. Bonhoeffer feels that religion is a historically conditioned framework or structure into which the Christian faith is automatically born. Religion not only hinders the Word of God but also restricts the Christian's living response to Revelation by locking him into a value system grounded not in Christ but in the Christian religion. While Bonhoeffer did not write ethics during this last period of his life, the ethical implications cannot be separated from the fragments of his theology. As has been shown, theology for Bonhoeffer consisted solely of values and value judgements and this is interwoven in his understanding of discipleship.

Bonhoeffer feels that there is a trend away from religion;

1. Bethge, E. Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
Page 763.

there is a growing independence of the world, what Bonhoeffer calls 'the world's coming of age'. The religious premise is replaced by this new premise of man come of age. Bonhoeffer feels that this is not bad in itself for it offers a perspective which allows the individual to be more human and therefore more complete in Christ. René Descartes saw the world operating as a mechanism without the intervention of God; Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, sees the world as operating without the need of God, and precisely because the world no longer needs God can grace express itself freely. God's grace is at the same time the source of the Christian's strength which allows him to live in and cope with the reality of a world without religion and without the God of religion. God's action affirms the world and gives new historical possibilities to mankind. The Word of God in relation to world problems "...is not a solution, but a redemption...and yet for that very reason He does really bring the solution of all human problems as well".¹

If we hide behind our religious presuppositions then Jesus Christ is limited by those same presuppositions from taking form in the world. What Bonhoeffer is actually suggesting is that we live 'with God and before God without God'. Christ has freed us from the rule of arbitrary and alien laws, ideals and ideologies, religion and now, from 'false conceptions

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 355.

of God' or, as they are Biblically known, idols. In Bonhoeffer's words,

God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who makes us live in this world without using him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing. Before God and with him we live without God. God allows himself to be edged out of the world and onto the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us. Matthew 8:17 makes it crystal clear that it is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us, but by his weakness and suffering.¹

The purpose of Christ's suffering is to redeem mankind. Christ is the 'being for others' and it is through participating in that reality that the world is claimed for Christ. It was Bonhoeffer's understanding of the 'imitatio Christi' that allowed him to speak of Christ without religion. Bonhoeffer's rejection of religion is not a description of the nature of the Church in the present age (although there are obviously implications for the Church), nor is his rejection of religion a prophecy of the inevitable future (in which case he would

1. Bonhoeffer, D., Letters and Papers From Prison. Pages 360-361.

certainly have been found wrong), but rather, it is a theological statement about the nature of faith itself. For Bonhoeffer, faith is faith only when it is created at the crucial moment of decision. Without the moral structures and values derived from the 'religious framework', the Christian is forced to act solely in imitation of Christ. As did Christ, he must accept responsibility for his actions and ultimately he must be crucified alongside of Christ.

It is no longer possible to reduce Christ to a Christological principle which was always the danger during the days of the Church struggle. Heinrich Ott in his book Reality and Faith has commented on this change in Bonhoeffer's thought and its significance.

There is no Christological 'systematic principle' which one could always apply; the task is rather to discover Jesus Christ anew in every individual or collective situation. Thus theology and proclamation become wayfarers in history as 'praedicatio et theologia viatorum'! Here theology reveals itself in its deepest being as a method, as a continuing wayfaring, and not as a system. A 'theologia viatorum' is no system, even if again and again it has to make affirmations which are 'systematic', that is to say, coherent in themselves.¹

1. Ott, H.. Reality and Faith.
Page 443.

SUMMARY

As was established in The Cost of Discipleship the imitation of Christ means following Christ to the Cross, and in the Letters and Papers From Prison it means 'sharing in the suffering of Christ at the hands of a godless world'. Traditionally, participation in the reality of Christ has meant a rejection or disregard for the world, but as Bonhoeffer says,

If one does that, one is not speaking of the God who entered the world in Jesus Christ, but rather of some metaphysical idol.¹

It is Bonhoeffer's Christology of 'being for others' which guarantees that Bonhoeffer's 'imitatio' is a worldly 'imitatio'. 'Being for others' also prevents Bonhoeffer's theology and ethics from being based upon a doctrine of individual salvation as is all too common in both the Lutheran tradition and the 'imitatio' as practiced in the medieval tradition. This element of 'suffering' and 'being for others' distinguishes Bonhoeffer's theology as a 'theologia crucis'. In his earlier work, The Cost of Discipleship, Bonhoeffer felt that the disciple is responsible only to Christ even at the cost of the world. In this latter period, however, the disciple must still be obedient to Christ through the 'imitatio Christi', but through the 'imitatio' he is also responsible to the world. In fact, the

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 364.

world and Christ are no longer seen by Bonhoeffer as separate realities and so obedience to the demands of one is automatically obedience to the demands of the other.

To conclude, I quote a passage from Bonhoeffer's "Outline For a Book", written in August of 1944, which he unfortunately never had a chance to complete, but which clearly shows that he intended to continue using the 'imitatio' as a cornerstone of his theology.

A transformation of all human life is given in the fact that 'Jesus is there only for others'. His 'being there for others' is the experience of transcendence. It is only this 'being there for others', maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross, and resurrection). Our relation to God is not a 'religious' relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable — that is not authentic transcendence — but our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others', through participation in the being of Jesus.¹

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Letters and Papers From Prison.
Page 381.

Chapter III

THE ETHICS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Dietrich Bonhoeffer holds an important place in modern theology. Many contemporary theologians have been greatly influenced by both his life and thought. Often these theologians make a point of expressing their debt to Bonhoeffer and to understand their thought better, it is often wise to relate it to their source. When we do this, we sometimes find that many have been less influenced by Bonhoeffer than they claimed.

The heirs of Bonhoeffer fall into three primary groups. One group accepts Bonhoeffer's methodology and uses it to create radically new positions. Among this group are people such as Paul van Buren, Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton. Another group, whose members include Ronald Gregor Smith, J. A. T. Robinson and Harvey Cox, accepts the substance of Bonhoeffer's thought and attempts to refine it and apply it to questions which Bonhoeffer, because of his untimely death, never had an opportunity to do.

There is yet one more group which Bonhoeffer may be said to have greatly influenced. These are the advocates of 'situational ethics' whose best known representative is Joseph Fletcher.¹ Fletcher often quotes Bonhoeffer and uses him to support his own position. Many discussions of Bonhoeffer's ethical thought accept the polarized categories of 'legalism',

1. Other situational works have previously appeared which do not rely on Bonhoeffer. Among the best known of these are Paul Lehmann's Ethics in a Christian Context and H. Richard Niebuhr's The Responsible Self.

'antinomianism' and 'situationalism' as presented by Fletcher. For example, William Kuhns, in his book In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, states that Bonhoeffer's "...own efforts in the movement come not as a Christian mandate, but as a tragic necessity...."¹. Kuhns has obviously accepted Fletcher's categories to arrive at that conclusion. Kuhns and other commentators on Bonhoeffer's ethics see his position as choosing the lesser of two evils, thereby, presenting Bonhoeffer's ethics as being utilitarian and pragmatic. Bonhoeffer never actually took part in the assassination attempts on Hitler's life and some people excuse him on that ground. This is a misrepresentation of Bonhoeffer's ethics and an attempt to excuse a man who needs no excuses. Bonhoeffer's ethic of responsibility means precisely that he is responsible. The success or failure of the act are irrelevant in terms of its justification. If we remember Bonhoeffer's understanding of discipleship and the Christology which informed his ethical decision-making process then we cannot come to any other conclusion except to see that, contrary to what Kuhns says, it was 'a Christian mandate'. Larry L. Rasmussen concludes that, according to Bonhoeffer, the responsible Christian "...may even have to consider and carry out tyrannicide, or actively support those who do. He will bear his colleagues' burdens and share their sinfulness even when they are not related

1. Kuhns, William. In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Page 232.

directly to his own actions. And he will do so as an extraordinary form of the 'imitatio Christi' in a demonic society".¹

* The first thing one notices about Bonhoeffer's ethics is its concrete worldliness. Bonhoeffer felt he could not affirm the peace of the pietist or the beyond of the spiritualist or the subjectivity of the mystic. To affirm these, Bonhoeffer felt, was to be disloyal to both the earth and to Christ. As Bonhoeffer said,

I fear that Christians who stand with only one leg upon earth also stand with only one leg in heaven.²

One of the most important ethical influences upon Bonhoeffer appears to be Friedrich Nietzsche as the many references to him support.³ As Eberhard Bethge pointed out, "Friedrich Nietzsche die Treue zur Erde zu überlassen, konnte Dietrich Bonhoeffer nicht ertragen".⁴ It was Nietzsche who called Christian ethics 'a slave morality' and Bonhoeffer's own ethical writings appear

1. Rasmussen, L. L.. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance. Page 52.

2. Bonhoeffer, D.. "The Other Letters From Prison" in Letters and Papers From Prison. Page 415.

3. Nietzsche's influence on Bonhoeffer was very strong. The story of Antaeus, the giant who had strength only when his feet were on the ground, appears in a speech Bonhoeffer made as early as 1928 and in a play he wrote as late as 1944. See Gesammelte Schriften, Band 3, pages 57, 494; No Rusty Swords, page 47.

4. Bethge, E.. "Vorwort", Gesammelte Schriften, Band 3. Page 7.

"Bonhoeffer could not bear to let Friedrich Nietzsche have a monopoly of loyalty to the earth."

to be an attempt to refute that charge while at the same time always keeping in mind that "...any attempt to lay down principles is like trying to draw a bird in flight".¹

While for Nietzsche it was the 'superman' who was beyond good and evil, for Bonhoeffer it was 'the Christian made free' who is beyond good and evil; it is life in Christ alone that is beyond good and evil.

The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge.²

Good and evil for Bonhoeffer belonged to 'man in Adam'. For Bonhoeffer, man "...can know God only if he knows only God. The knowledge of good and evil is therefore separation from God. Only against God can man know good and evil".³

Bonhoeffer's rejection of good and evil as ethical categories is rooted in his Christological understanding of reality. Christian ethics is generally seen as an attempt to unite the sacred and profane dimensions, an enterprise which Bonhoeffer believes must necessarily fail for it rests on the assumption "...that there are realities which lie outside the reality that is in Christ".⁴ It is this 'two-sphere' thinking

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. No Rusty Swords.
Page 36.

2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 17.

3. Ibid... Page 142.

4. Ibid... Page 196.

which Bonhoeffer rejected. 'Two-sphere' thinking has given Christ a place in the world, an important place no doubt, but still only one among others. For Bonhoeffer the distinction between sacred and secular is overcome through the unity derived from the reality of Christ. It is a polemical unity which denies both separation or a pantheistic identification. Through Christ, God has entered the world and the sacred has entered into the secular.

Not only was Bonhoeffer rejecting good and evil as ethical categories, but he was in fact rejecting ethics altogether. Bonhoeffer not only feels that ethics change with time and place but in fact we cannot even speak of Christian ethics because basically Christianity is amoral. Humanity is bound by no rules or laws or general principles, for Christ came to offer freedom.

Christianity speaks of the single way of God to man, from the merciful love of God to unrighteous men and sinners.... What has that to do with ethics, which speaks of the way of man to God...Christianity speaks of grace, ethics speaks of righteousness.¹

Bonhoeffer denied a Christian ethic but because of his denial, his theology, with its central Christology, itself becomes ethicized. It is not that ethics replaced theology in Bonhoeffer's

1. Bonhoeffer, D., No Easy Swords.
Pages 40-41.

thought, but rather, that theology directly informs actions without the necessity of rules and often without the possibility of guidelines. Ethics as an ontological component of reality places 'the good' into reality. The 'good' is not a separate realm, which as an ideal shows man what he ought to be. God is good and God is in all things, thereby sustaining and redeeming the world. The realization of the 'good' is therefore achieved by participation in the reality which at its basis is good. The problem of ethics at once assumes a new aspect. What becomes of ultimate importance is now no longer "...that I should become good, or that the condition of the world should be made better by my action, but that the reality of God should show itself everywhere to be the ultimate reality".¹

The basis of Christian ethics is the reality of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. All human behavior must be seen in relation to this ultimate reality. The problem of Christian ethics is how this revelation of God in Jesus Christ is to be realized among his creatures. The 'good' therefore takes on a new meaning. The question of 'good' is not a matter of behavior but of participation in the ultimate reality as revealed in Christ. It is not a question of applying a rule, law or principle to a situation but of sharing in Christ, of living in conformation to Christ. There are not two worlds, the sacred and the profane, but for the disciple only one.

1. Bonhoeffer, D. Ethics.
Page 188.

Sharing in Christ we stand at once
in both the reality of God and the
reality of the world.¹

Surprisingly enough, Bonhoeffer is not subscribing to antinomianism. The radically Christocentric nature of his ethics prevents this from occurring. Bonhoeffer's ethics, the ethics of discipleship, rather than being oriented towards morality are oriented entirely toward Revelation. The Christian ethic should not be concerned with the 'good' but solely with God's Revelation. Bonhoeffer has always held this position, the earliest example of which is found in a sermon he gave in Barcelona in 1929.

The Christian message stands beyond good and evil; and that must be the case, for should the grace of God be made dependent upon the extent of man's good or evil, the basis would be laid for a claim of man upon God.²

Barth maintained that 'the doctrine of God is at every point ethics; and in the background of every Christian ethical decision there should be a doctrine of God'. Bonhoeffer would agree with Barth but for him Christ must be more than merely in the 'background' of an ethical decision. Christology and ethics are inextricably interwoven within Bonhoeffer's

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 197.

2. Bonhoeffer, D.. No Rusty Swords.
Page 41.

understanding of discipleship and the 'imitatio Christi'.

Bonhoeffer learned much from Barth but on the subject of ethics he disagreed with him from the very beginning. Barth had said that beside 'the one great light in the night', there are also 'lesser lights' or relative ethical criteria and norms. Bonhoeffer disagreed with Barth radically on this point and did not accept either the significance, application or nature of these other criteria. Barth, for example, talks of 'moulding the state into the likeness of the Kingdom of God'. Bonhoeffer cannot accept that the ethical task of the state can be discovered by exegesis.¹ For Bonhoeffer, this is totally foreign to the freedom of decision he emphasized. Bonhoeffer is convinced that what God did for mankind through Christ is not to offer a program for the ethical and religious shaping of the world, but rather, to allow us to become truly human. While Barth built a system and build freedom into the system, Bonhoeffer's theological behavior, taken as a whole, reveals a decision not to build a system but to express the freedom of God through concrete decisions.

1: Bonhoeffer, D.. No Rusty Swords.
Page 116.

In a letter to Erwin Sutz, Bonhoeffer describes the meeting he had with Karl Barth in Bonn.

"We very soon arrived at the problem of ethics and discussed it a long time. He did not agree with me where I expected it. Barth said that besides the one great light in the darkness there were other lesser lights, what he called 'relative ethical criteria', whose sense and right to exist he could however not make clear to me; we got no further than his resort to the Bible."

As was established in the previous section of this paper, the basis of discipleship for Bonhoeffer is the 'imitatio Christi'. Moreover, it must also be considered as the theological basis of ethical action. Luther had originally rejected the 'imitatio Christi' during the Reformation because of its abuses by Rome, but also in part because he felt, and rightly so, that it led to a depreciation of ethics.

Despite the Biblical and early Christian acceptance of the 'imitatio Christi' as a legitimate source of Christian conduct, Luther's resistance has persisted, particularly in the field of Christian ethics. Resistance to taking the 'imitatio' seriously is also found within the presuppositions of some of the greatest philosophers. Immanuel Kant had little use for exemplars of religious morality. He wrote,

There can be no patterns in religion, since the ground, the first principle of behaviour must lie in the reason, and it is not to be deduced 'a posteriori'.... If, then, saintly people are presented to me as models of religion, I must not imitate them, be they ever so holy, I must judge rather by universal rules of morality. There are, indeed exemplars of righteousness, of virtue, and even of holiness, such as the Example set before us in the Gospels, but this example of the earthly life does not serve as our ground of judgement; rather we judge it by the holy law.¹

1. Kant, I.. Lectures on Ethics.
Pages 109 - 110.

This approach which begins with a preconceived notion of what 'goodness' is and projects it onto Christ cannot be reconciled with the New Testament. This 'a priori' approach is presumptuous because it assumes that the nature of the 'real' man can be known without recourse to the life of Jesus in its cultural and historical setting.

Many Protestants, especially those closely in line with Lutheran theology or Kantian philosophy, even today regard the 'imitatio Christi' as leading to a depreciation of ethics. This attitude is clearly reflected in Paul Tillich's analysis of the 'imitatio'.

Imitatio Christi is often understood as the attempt to transform one's life into a copy of the life of Jesus, including the concrete traits of the biblical picture. But this contradicts the meaning of these traits as parts of his being within the picture of Jesus the Christ. These traits are supposed to make translucent the New Being, which is his being. As such they point beyond their contingent character and are not instances to imitate. If they are used in this way, they lose their transparency and become ritualistic or ascetic prescriptions. If the word 'imitation' is used at all in this context, it should indicate that we, in our concreteness, are asked to participate in the New Being and be transformed by it, not beyond but within the contingencies of our life. Not his actions but the being out of which his

actions come make him the Christ.... Protestantism, therefore, rightly hesitated to use these terms after their patent abuse in Roman Catholicism. And Protestantism should resist pietistic and revivalist attempts which separate the actions of Christ from his being.¹

As was established in the previous section, Bonhoeffer did not simply revive the concept of the 'imitatio Christi' but he also gave it a decidedly Protestant twist. Bonhoeffer takes Tillich's warning to heart and does not separate the actions of Jesus from the being of Christ. Bonhoeffer recognized that for the 'imitatio' to be an ethical norm, Jesus of Nazareth must be seen as more than a moral authority, he must be the Christ. The danger of any discussion of the 'imitatio' is that of reducing Christ to the categories of 'hero', 'religious leader' or to the ethical category of 'the good man'. It is, however, impossible to speak of the imitation of Christ in these purely phenomenological terms because the being of Christ transcends the given laws of phenomenology. After the failures of the so-called 'search for the historical Jesus' and considering Bonhoeffer's own dialectical methodology, it is clear that he did not feel that hermeneutics and a dogmatic exegesis alone could be the basis of ethics. Ethical fundamentalism even if, or perhaps especially if,

1. Tillich, Paul. Systematic Theology, Vol. II. Pages 122 - 123.

restricted solely to the Gospels was not an open possibility for Bonhoeffer. Biblical authority is for many people no longer possible because historical-critical scholarship has related so much of what is written in the Bible to its 'Zeit im Leben' or the time and place within which it was written.

Unlike that of his Liberal teachers, for Bonhoeffer the Christ of faith who exists in the present historical structure and the Jesus of Nazareth are one unity. God became man, not a type of man but simply man, "...it is not written that God became an idea, a principle, a program, a universally valid proposition or a law, but that God became man".¹ For Bonhoeffer, the Bible first of all points toward the living God, and thus what is required of ethics is obedience to a person, not a proposition. This humanity of God becomes the basis for Bonhoeffer's understanding of 'concrete' ethics.

Bonhoeffer does not mean that ethics be based on what Tillich refers to as 'the concrete traits of the biblical picture'. The 'imitatio Christi' does not mean that one has to enter town riding on an ass, but rather one participates in the being of Jesus Christ by being wholly for the world. God remains transcendent, not in an epistemological sense, but in an ethical sense. Calvin, who believed that Christ had been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life, rejected fasting as a 'holy imitation of Christ'

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 85.

because "...it is plain that Christ did not fast to set an example for others".¹ Jesus laid down no rules for Christian conduct. Biblical ethics remain unclear for "...in the New Testament there is no single question put by man to Jesus which Jesus answers with an acceptance of the human either/or that every such question implies".²

In order to imitate Jesus, however, we need to be able to separate the incidental from the essential. The ideal life as portrayed in the New Testament reflects the trivial as well as the important characteristics of the age. James Gustafson gives us a good example of this when he asks "...does the following of Jesus as a moral ideal require that one dress as men did in Judea and Galilee at that time? Obviously, no. But does the picture of Jesus require that the follower dress simply, without expensive adornment, without luxury?".³

Edmond Barbotin comments that imitation risks introducing us into rigid types and conventions which are no longer those of an authentic moral existence. Models usually present us with values which are the result of historical perspectives different from our own. In his words,

The imitation of moral conduct cannot

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1. Calvin, J.. Institutes of the Christian Religion. Book IV, XII; 20.
 2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics. Page 29.
 3. Gustafson, J.. Christ and the Moral Life. Page 161.

but release the amoral forces of mimicry. This is especially true in communal life where the example of a great person easily loses its value and becomes conformity and is moral only in appearance. In reality, the uprightness of moral action demands much more than an exact reduplication of the model; rather it calls for the personal acceptance of the moral intention, the interiorization of the spiritual motivation, the creation of a personal response to a call whose value is ever unique and ever new.¹

Jesus was not a new Moses handing down behavioural law, instead, by example he gave us a pattern which we must follow to achieve true manhood, to participate in the New Being. Christ is the Word become flesh and the disciple must not only hear the Word or repeat it but must act it out. We must discover culturally equivalent actions which are more truly imitative of Jesus in our own society. The modern disciple must live the life of the Word.

Christian ethics for Bonhoeffer involved concretely following the pattern of true humanity proclaimed in Christ's words and actions. To put it simply, Christ was not a 'homo religiosus', but simply man, man for others released from the constraints of the Old Testament law by being the fulfillment

1. Barbotin, E., Le témoignage spirituel, (Paris, 1964) as translated and quoted in Imitating Christ, ed. by E. J. Malatesta S. J., page 83.

of that law.

The ethical heart of the 'imitatio Christi' is the dialectical process of man conforming to Christ and thereby allowing Christ to take form in the world. The individual himself changes, conforming more closely to his own structure, the pattern of true humanity. 'Imitatio Christi' does not mean that we create Christ by our imitation, or that we replace the crucified Jesus, but rather we participate in the person of Christ. Max Scheler, using psychological terminology, explains that the role of Christ in this process of participation is that of "...an ideal figure which is constantly present to the soul of the individual or the group, so much so that little by little the traits of that person are acquired and are transformed into oneself: one's being, one's life, one's acts, consciously or unconsciously, are ruled by it in a way that causes the subject to be pleased with following the model or to reproach himself if it is not imitated".¹

This takes us to the two primary components of the 'imitatio Christi' which have been only briefly mentioned so far. These are the concepts of 'formation' and 'conformation'. As E. H. Robertson pointed out,

If there can be said to be one answer
to Bonhoeffer's ethical problem, it was

1. Scheler, M., "Vorbilder und Führer" in Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Vol. I, page 27 (Berlin, 1933) as translated and quoted in Imitating Christ, ed. by E. J. Malatesta S. J., page 68.

in what he came to call 'conformation'
— the mind formed after the mind of
Christ.¹

Formation should not be seen as the autonomous work of man for it is 'conformation' with reality itself, the only reality Jesus Christ. 'Conformation' with Christ "...is not achieved by dint of efforts 'to become like Jesus', which is the way in which we usually interpret it. It is achieved only when the form of Jesus Christ itself works upon us in such a manner that it moulds our form in its own likeness (Gal. 4:19). Christ remains the only giver of forms. It is not Christian men who shape the world with their ideas, but it is Christ who shapes men in conformity with himself. But just as we misunderstand the form of Christ if we take him to be essentially the teacher of a pious and good life, so, too, we should misunderstand the formation of man if we were to regard it as instruction in the way in which a pious and good life is to be attained".² The ethics of Bonhoeffer are not based upon an autonomous individualistic value system but are based entirely on Christ himself, and thus can hardly be seen as antinomian. Also, because the structure of reality is the 'Christus pro nobis', through the 'imitatio Christi', the individual must become a participant in that same reality by also being there for others. This of

1. Robertson, E. H., "Introduction", No Rusty Swords, Page 10.

2. Bonhoeffer, D., Ethics, Page 17.

course must lead to a radical understanding of theological ethics.

Bonhoeffer's ethic is obviously 'situational' in the sense that it is firmly grounded in the historical but it transcends the purely individualistic. The 'imitatio Christi' drives ethics beyond the individual concern through the stressing of 'responsibility'. Ethical responsibility is derived from the concrete encounter with another person, and structurally it is always the same person, Jesus Christ. Since the Christian faith is adherence to a person, the natural consequence is a personalist ethic.¹ Bonhoeffer's ethics are a personalist-relational ethic for Christ is truly human and comes to us through human society. While 'vocation' applied to the community of Revelation and not merely the individual, so the 'imitatio Christi' is the concrete moulding of not only personal but collective life to the reality and pattern of Jesus Christ. This shift from discipleship as vocation to discipleship as 'imitatio' also corresponds with the shift of emphasis from an ethic of the disciple in the church to an ethic of the Christian in the world. Christianity itself must be seen as adherence not to an abstract law or commandment but

1. 'Ethical responsibility' is a cornerstone of the theology of the 'personalist school'. In the words of Martin Buber, "The idea of responsibility is to be brought back from the province of specialized ethics, of an 'ought' that swings free in the air, into that of lived life. Genuine responsibility exists only where there is real responding." Buber, M., "Dialogue" (Eiselen, 1929) in *Existentialism* and *Man*, page 33.

above all to a 'person' who is "...the way, the truth and the life". (John 14:6) This is the basis of Bonhoeffer's personalist ethic.

Bonhoeffer feels that the duty of creation is that it should affirm and continue God's work.¹ This is accomplished when the disciple responds in creative obedience to God. Obedience, which was first mentioned in Sanctorum Communio, thus becomes a major element of Bonhoeffer's presentation of discipleship. One of the basic ingredients of the 'imitatio' implicit within the call of Christ, is this demand for obedience, not an obedience to laws and principles but to the reality of Christ. For Bonhoeffer "...only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes".² These lines are significant for understanding Bonhoeffer's ethics for his life cannot be understood without them. His life and thought are held in dialectical tension as are faith and obedience. What Bonhoeffer did determined his beliefs and his beliefs went on to determine what he did.

Emil Brunner in The Divine Imperative also saw discipleship essentially as obedience, whatever the particular content of the command (although for Brunner the command was always one of love). Bonhoeffer agrees with Brunner and feels that

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Creation and Fall.
Page 33.

2. Bonhoeffer, D.. The Cost of Discipleship.
Page 69.

Christ demands of his disciples not the observance of some manageable or unmanageable code of behavior, but the radical surrender of their wills in obedience and love. Obedience for Bonhoeffer is 'surrender' and ethics must begin with this task; the total surrender of the self through the act of conformation.

Obedying the call to discipleship means that a concrete demand must be responded to. Conformation must then also mean the guidance and providence of God. The disciple has been freed from the law as an instrument by which God's will is known, but this does not mean that the disciple is free of God's will. When the disciple does God's will he knows the love of God. If approaching the problem of Christian ethics from this perspective, the question, How can I be good? of traditional ethics becomes, What is the will of God? Often these two are seen as being synonymous but for Bonhoeffer this is not the case. Sinful man deludes himself if he assumes to know the good. The major ethical task of the disciple is solely to seek and do God's will. What this presupposes, according to Bonhoeffer, is "...a decision with regard to ultimate reality, a decision of faith".¹ In Bonhoeffer's case this does not mean that faith in an ultimate reality leads to an ethical decision, but rather faith equals ultimate reality. For fallen man they are one in the same. This is not a reduction of theology but an expansion of ethics. Kierkegaard, in

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 186.

his exegesis of the story of Abraham, clearly shows the close relationship between obedience and faith. Abraham's obedience forced him to suspend his own moral judgements in order to maintain communion with God. This is what Kierkegaard means by his 'teleological suspension of the ethical'. Justification for Abraham's action comes solely from this personal relationship to God.¹ His decision is not irrational but supra-rational, it does not deny ethics but transcends morality.

One of the prominent characteristics of the ethics of the neo-Protestant theologians is their determinism. For Brunner, Barth and Bonhoeffer the Christian life, the life of discipleship, is determined throughout by the Word of God. To paraphrase Bonhoeffer, 'God can bring good out of evil, even the greatest of evils'. This of course brings up the old problem of freedom and determinism. For Bonhoeffer, man does exercise his freedom, for he does not always do the will of God. The dialectic which we find so often in Bonhoeffer is found here as well. Man in his freedom, freely gives himself and his actions to God and in so doing receives the guidance which he is still free to accept or reject. Freedom and the will of God are not seen as mutually exclusive.

The man who acts in the freedom of
his own most personal responsibility is
precisely the man who sees his action

1. Kierkegaard, S.. Fear and Trembling.
Pages 79 - 88.

finally committed to the guidance of God. The free deed knows itself in the end as the deed of God; the decision knows itself as guidance; the free venture knows itself as divine necessity.¹

Even when God's guidance sent Bonhoeffer to his imminent death, he could still write,

I am so sure of God's guiding hand that I hope I shall always be kept in that certainty. You must never doubt that I am travelling with gratitude and cheerfulness along the road where I am being led.²

For many modern theologians the will of God stands wholly outside of the individual's life for God is seen as 'the wholly other'. For Bonhoeffer, God also is 'wholly other', but the will of God is not found in abstract ethical commandments. The will of God "...is nothing other than the becoming real of the reality of Christ with us and in our world. The will of God, therefore is not an idea, still demanding to become real; it is itself a reality already sustained in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ".³ And further,

In Christ we are offered the possibility

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1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 186.
 2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Letters and Papers From Prison.
Page 393.
 3. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 77.

of partaking in the reality of God and in the reality of the world, but not in one without the other. The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world, and when I encounter the reality of the world it is already sustained, accepted and reconciled in the reality of God.¹

This means that for Bonhoeffer, reality itself is good. The good is not some 'ought' standing above reality but it is reality itself, 'sustained, accepted and reconciled' in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I could not say it better than Heinrich Ott, who in his book Reality and Faith, said of Bonhoeffer's ethics,

Christ therefore, the unity of God and the world, its reconciliation, the gracious immanence of God in the world, in its circumstances, in its ethical situations, but immanence regarded as a person, as a 'Thou' whom one can address, Christ is the material 'continuum', the trustworthy element which runs through concrete situations and confirms them all in their very concreteness. The knowledge of Christ is also each time a knowledge now in the situation, and, above all characteristically in the 'ethical' situation. One could say, that according to Bonhoeffer, the man who really knows Christ as here

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 195.

each time, also knows what is real and what is to be done. Yes, we can even go so far as to dare to say the converse, that the man who knows each time what is real and what is to be done, by that very fact in reality knows Christ.¹

The question for Bonhoeffer must be whether he does in fact conform to the form of Christ in the world; whether he is acting in accordance with reality. The ethics of the 'imitatio' must be a response to the Christological question, How is Christtaking form in the world: and, What actions on my part correspond to that form? The final judgement of whether an action done in free responsibility does actually correspond to the Christological reality according to Bonhoeffer lies solely with God. It may be said that morality is the bi-product of maturing faith. It is the outcome of increasing conformation to Christ, but in the end Bonhoeffer's ethics must always be seen as an ethic of justification by grace alone.

Bonhoeffer takes with the utmost seriousness the phrase 'Thy will hath been done'. Sinful man is justified by grace but this justification cost God the death of His Son. This doctrine of justification is not a call to worldly inaction or complacency for this would be an acceptance of 'cheap grace' or, to paraphrase Luther, 'sin bravely' for "...only in

1. Ott, H.. Reality and Faith.
Page 268.

doing can there be submission to the will of God".¹ The 'imitatio' must take place in the midst of life's "...duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities".²

Through grace, God has set the conditions of the relationship which allows man to live a worldly existence and actively participate in Revelation. Christ takes everyone who really encounters him and turns them around to face the world. Christ is the safeguard which prevents withdrawal from the world.

Whoever sets their eyes on the body of Jesus Christ can never again speak of the world as though...it were separated from Christ; he can never again with clerical arrogance set himself apart from the world.³

Whereas in most ethical discussions, life is directed 'towards' God, now, however, life can also be lived 'from' God as its centre. Man through the 'imitatio Christi' becomes conformed with the form of Christ and grace allows him to live 'from' that centre. Bonhoeffer begins with the centrality of conformity to Jesus Christ reasoning from incarnation to historical responsibility. Christ not only bids the disciple

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 43.

2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Letters and Papers From Prison.
Page 197.

3. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 205.

to follow, but grace actually allows him to follow. Again, to understand 'conformation' simply as 'becoming like Jesus' is to misunderstand the true form of Christ. The form of Christ is not a 'religious' pattern to which we must conform, it is rather the pattern of true humanity.¹

To be conformed with the Incarnate —that is to be a real man. It is man's right and duty that he should be man. The quest for the superman, the endeavour to outgrow the man within the man, the pursuit of the heroic, the cult of the demigod, all this is not the proper concern of man, for it is untrue. The real man is not an object either for contempt or for deification, but an object of the love of God. The rich and manifold variety of God's creation suffers no violence here from false uniformity or from the forcing of men into the pattern of an ideal, of a type, or a definite picture of the human character. The real man is at liberty to be his Creator's creature. To be conformed with the Incarnate is to have the right to be the man one really is. Now there is no more pretence, no more hypocrisy or self-violence, no more compulsion to be something other, better and more ideal

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1. Bonhoeffer's concern is echoed by Albert Camus who in The Rebel writes that 'man is the only creature who refuses to be what he is'. Bonhoeffer never attempts to make man more than 'the Creator's creature'. For Bonhoeffer as for Kierkegaard, man must 'become what he already is'.

than what one is. God loves the real man.
God became a real man.¹

Bonhoeffer's faith in the providence of God working within history is not based upon a theology of history (Hegel), a seeking to discover the plan of history and salvation. It is not an evolutionary optimism (Teilhard de Chardin). It is rather a conscious acceptance and bewilderment, a knowing that behind the events of history lies the hand of God. It is a recognition of the 'mysterium et tremendum' as Rudolph Otto maintained, or the recognition of the existential 'fear and trembling' stressed by Kierkegaard. It is this recognition which allows the disciple to act and be justified in his actions while still giving him absolute freedom and absolute responsibility for his actions. Bonhoeffer is closely in line with Luther on this point. In responsibility both freedom and obedience are realized. Responsibility implies the tension between freedom and obedience. The paradox is that man is free to be obedient. Only in obedience to Christ can there be freedom, and only in freedom can one be obedient to Christ. Luther, in "On the Liberty of the Christian Man" wrote,

A Christian man is perfectly free Lord
of all, subject to none; a Christian man
is perfectly dutiful servant of all,
subject to all.²

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 81.
2. Luther, Martin. Three Treatises, page 251. See also
The Works of Martin Luther, Vol. II, page 312.

To sum up Bonhoeffer's position, ethical codes are a product of history, separate from the Christian message, useful as guidelines but disposable, for the proclamation of grace stands beyond good and evil. The Christian message offers no new commandments or moral principles for humanity. Instead, the Christian message reminds us that only in freedom can we be truly obedient to the will of God. From this perspective ethics must be seen not as "...something that has descended from heaven to earth, but it is rather a child of the earth".¹

One of the outstanding features of Bonhoeffer's ethics is its 'relativism', and it is this which is so necessary as a basis for any 'situational' ethic. It is this aspect of Bonhoeffer's theology that Joseph Fletcher uses to support his own position as outlined in the book Situation Ethics. Fletcher speaks of 'situations' but always in relation to an absolute principle or norm by which ethics are relativized. For Fletcher this absolute is love.²

There is only one thing that is
always good and right, intrinsically
good regardless of the context, and
that one thing is love.³

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1. Bonhoeffer, D.. No Rusty Swords.
Page 40.
 2. Fletcher believes that "Only love is a constant; everything else is a variable", (page 44, Situation Ethics). For a further discussion of this point see also pages 45 and 61.
 3. Fletcher, J.. Situation Ethics.
Page 60.

Love alone for Fletcher is intrinsically good, it equals justice, it is a principle and a norm.¹ As a principle it does everything Bonhoeffer argued against. It is the secular city's 'deus ex machina', the 'working hypothesis' and a 'stop-gap'.

Bonhoeffer, like Fletcher, recognizes the importance of 'love' for Christian ethics, but he does not accept love as the first principle of Christian ethics. Recognizing the sinful nature of humanity and the complexity of all motivation, Bonhoeffer writes,

Human love makes itself an end in itself. It creates of itself an end, an idol which it worships, to which it must subject everything.²

For Bonhoeffer, love alone is not adequate as a basis for Christian fellowship. Love has negative aspects for fallen man no matter how good the intentions may be. Only Christ can play a mediating role in Christian fellowship, as Bonhoeffer

1. Fletcher never properly defines the term 'love', and the way in which he uses it makes it a catch-all concept. As James M. Gustafson has commented,

" 'Love', like 'situation', is a word that runs through Fletcher's book like a greased pig.... Nowhere does Fletcher indicate in a systematic way his various uses of it. It refers to everything he wants it to refer to.

Gustafson, J. N.. "The Christian Century", May 12, 1966, as quoted in The Situation Ethics Debate, ed. by H. Cox, page 81.

2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Life Together. Page 25.

learned in Finkenwalde and explains in his book Life Together.

This means that I must release the other person from every attempt of mine to regulate, coerce, and dominate him with my love. The other person needs to retain his independence of me.... Because Christ has long since acted decisively for my brother, before I could begin to act, I must leave him his freedom to be Christ's; I must meet him only as the person that he already is in Christ's eyes.¹

As early as 1929 Bonhoeffer understood the message of the Sermon on the Mount not as love but rather that man stands before the face of God and God's grace rules our lives. If there was a generally valid moral law, like love, then there would be a way from man to God and the relationship would be at the mercy of mankind. The ethical principles of the Sermon on the Mount must be understood but not accepted with authoritarian validity for eventually man would become a slave to principles and the spirit would be fixed in place thus totally denying creative potentiality. In his Ethics Bonhoeffer elaborates on the meaning of love for Christian ethics.

Everything that we have so far seen to be true excludes all those definitions of love as a human attitude, a conviction,

1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Letters and Papers From Prison.
Page 209.

devotion, sacrifice, the will to fellowship, feeling, brotherhood, service, action.¹

Love as a norm becomes almost idolatrous to Bonhoeffer for it is recognizable only in the light of Revelation. The love which is so important for ethics, in Christian ethics, must be deduced solely from Christology.

While this denial of love as the central element of Christian ethics would make us believe that Bonhoeffer's ethics are a cold and calculated affair, quite the contrary is true. For Bonhoeffer, the 'imitatio Christi' leads the disciple to one central realization. Christ's 'pro-me' stance must also be the position of the modern disciple. Discipleship is synonymous with responsibility. Paul held that laws lead us to Christ, but Bonhoeffer holds that Christ leads us to moral judgements and ethical decisions for which we have to take full responsibility as did Christ. Responsibility "...is always a relation between persons which has its foundation in the responsibility of Jesus Christ for man".²

Another theologian who placed strong emphasis upon love but yet rejected love as the absolute principle of Christian ethics was H. Richard Niebuhr who said,

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1. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics.
Page 72.
 2. Ibid... Page 238.

Jesus nowhere commands love for its own sake.... The virtue of Jesus' character and demand is not 'love of love' but 'love of God' and the neighbour in God. It was not love but God that filled his soul.¹

Bonhoeffer combined the radical freedom, which is so important in Kierkegaard, with the 'self in relation to others' which is derived from the 'personalist school'. Like Bonhoeffer, H. Richard Niebuhr also combined Martin Buber and existentialism, and in one sense their conclusions are similar. Niebuhr arrived at a position of 'social existentialism' which for him, as for Bonhoeffer, is characterized by 'responsibility'. In a posthumously published article, "Responsibility and Christ", Niebuhr states that the "...Christian ethos so uniquely exemplified in Christ himself is an ethics of universal responsibility".²

This is the dialectic of Bonhoeffer's 'responsibility'. We are responsible to the world and we must take full responsibility for our actions. Responsible action always includes man's readiness to accept the guilt that comes with freedom.³ Just

1. Niebuhr, H. R.. Christ and Culture.
Pages 15 - 19.

2. Niebuhr, H. R.. The Responsible Self.
Page 167.

3. The acceptance of guilt is a central element in Bonhoeffer's shift from passive to active resistance. Bonhoeffer accepted the guilt of his Church, nation and class which had allowed Hitler to come to power. Accepting this collective guilt meant also that Bonhoeffer was free to use the tools, even of murder, against an enemy that was using that same tool with utter ruthlessness.

as Jesus bore the guilt of all men, so all who are responsible in the name of Christ share in that guilt.

Bonhoeffer stressed responsibility in his ethics but he did not stress love. Fletcher, by using love as a norm, creates an either/or framework, thereby ignoring the subtleties and multi-dimensional aspects of Christian ethics. Love does not exonerate one from responsibility. Using love as a norm, which according to Bonhoeffer is tainted, means one is choosing only the lesser of the evils.

In the name of love, Fletcher makes killing less than killing and stealing less than stealing while for Bonhoeffer this is never the case. For Bonhoeffer, murder is still murder but to do it in the name of love is to deny personal and absolute responsibility for the act. Murder may be justified but to do it in the name of love is to imply it has God's approval. For Bonhoeffer, justification for an action comes solely from the life and cross of Christ. To be responsible means that extreme acts such as tyrannicide, while occasionally being necessary and demanded of one, can never be regarded as normal or ethically normative. As E. H. Robertson points out, Christ said "...harlots would enter the kingdom but he did not mean that harlotry was a necessary qualification".¹

What Fletcher appears to be lacking is the radical dialectical understanding which so characterizes Bonhoeffer's ethical

1. Robertson, E. H.. Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
Page IX.

thought. Bonhoeffer submits not only success and failure to God, as Fletcher's utilitarianism forces him to do,¹ but Bonhoeffer submits even the judgement of whether an act is a success or failure to God (1 Cor. 4:3). For Bonhoeffer, responsible action "...does not lay claim to knowledge of its own ultimate righteousness...(it) can never itself anticipate the judgement as to whether it is in conformity with its origin, its essence and its goal, but this judgement must be left entirely to God".² Ideological action, on the other hand, carries its own justification within itself from the outset within its guiding principle.

Since Jesus Christ is implicit in reality, there is a content to reality which gives meaning and direction in each situation. As Bonhoeffer says,

To understand reality is not the same as to know about outward events. It is to perceive the essential nature of things.... To recognize the significant in the factual is wisdom.³

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1. This allows or perhaps forces Fletcher to say "Only the end justifies the means, nothing else", (Situation Ethics, page 120). Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, states that the "...question of good must not be reduced to an examination of the motives or consequences of actions by applying to them some ready-made yardstick. An ethic of motives or of mental attitudes is as superficial as an ethic of practical consequences", (Ethics, page 192).
 2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Ethics. Page 234.
 3. Ibid... Page 68 - 69.

The 'significant' is of course Jesus Christ. The factual must be given its due, but without Christ it must fall short of the reality of God. No abstract laws or systems need be used to make an ethical decision. The disciple simply does what he knows he must do and he knows what he must do in accordance with what he perceives as the form of Christ as it takes form in the world. There is a complete surrender to the 'Thou' in responsible action, a complete passivity in the midst of activity.¹ This is not apathy or a submission to fate but a submission to the will of God which is hidden within the events. This is not to say that for Bonhoeffer ethical decisions are made entirely within a vacuum. It might be said that the modern disciple must live with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other in an attempt to see the form of Christ as it takes form in the world. Bonhoeffer brings to the decision making process all the tools of his own experiences and those of his community, but the decision once made and the consequent actions, while we are responsible for them, are freely given to God.

Bonhoeffer is speaking of ethics existentially within a personalist-relational context. He is not concerned with

1. F. C. Happold, in Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology, shows that there is a similarity between what Bonhoeffer is saying and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna states that there are two ways to God, the way of contemplation and the way of action. "The world is imprisoned in its own activity, except when actions are performed as worship of God. Therefore you must perform every action sacramentally and be free from all attachment to results." (Page 103)

providing clear, definable and objective criteria for testing and evaluating an action. As such, an extreme ethical case such as tyrannicide is something Bonhoeffer 'knows' that he must carry out because it is demanded of him by the situation; a situation in which no one else was willing to accept the responsibility of an action. At the same time, however, this act was not something his ethics could formally account for. What counts for Bonhoeffer is the conformation of the self to the form of Christ in the world, the formation of the character in conformation and communion with Christ.

Reliance on ethical principles is doomed to fail because in the end we will have to live by these rules even if, as Bonhoeffer says, 'they lead us to the devil'. An individual may live by rules but at a time 'when all concepts are being confused, distorted and turned upside down', the man of rules will not be able to fix his eyes on 'the simple truth of God'.

He will easily consent to the bad, knowing full well that it is bad, in order to ward off what is worse, and in doing this he will no longer be able to see that precisely the worse which he is trying to avoid may still be the better.¹

We now come to the crux of the matter. The central element of Bonhoeffer's thought and the greatest difference between Bonhoeffer and Fletcher is Christology. While Christ is central

1. Bonhoeffer, D., Ethics.
Page 5.

to Bonhoeffer as the theological basis for all ethical action, for Fletcher this is not the case. In fact, Fletcher mentions Bonhoeffer more times in Situation Ethics than he mentions Christ (four more times). In Fletcher's methodology, Jesus becomes simply a teacher, to say the best, or Christ a principle, to say the worst. In either case, Jesus Christ becomes extraneous and discipleship superfluous. While Fletcher is concerned primarily with methodology, Bonhoeffer's ethics are based on a Christological ontology. The difference is one of Christ versus a methodological principle even though this principle may be of great value for ethics. Love used in this way is merely a tool for Christian humanism, a rationale for good works, but to use Tillich's phrase, 'it lacks the dimension of depth'.

The advantage of the 'imitatio Christi' is that it recognizes Christ as the Revelation while love can best be said to be a characteristic of Revelation. For Bonhoeffer, the question is not, How is love best served?, but rather, Who art thou Lord? 'Con-form-ing' to the 'form' of Christ in the world is the basis of an ethical decision concerning the nature of reality itself. In discovering Christ within the situation the disciple knows what to do. One does not serve love but one serves Christ through radical obedience. God is love but love is not God and to do love is to abstract love from the situation.¹

1. For a discussion of this point see also H. R. Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, page 17.

It is to remove Christ from the situation and to apply a principle. The difference between Fletcher and Bonhoeffer therefore is not primarily a question of antinomianism, legalism or situationalism, but rather the difference is primarily Jesus Christ.

SUMMARY

Bonhoeffer was primarily concerned with the relationship between Jesus Christ and his modern disciple. The 'imitatio Christi' was for Bonhoeffer the basis of this relationship and as such was also the basis of acting ethically within the world, even when the support of both an ecclesiastical tradition and community had been forcibly removed. This was 'the Christian made free' who lived beyond good and evil. The road of the 'imitatio Christi' was for Bonhoeffer the road to freedom.

Bonhoeffer's Christological understanding of reality allowed him to be even more radical than ethicists such as Joseph Fletcher have given him credit for, but yet this same Christological understanding has prevented him from becoming antinomian. Bonhoeffer's Christological understanding of 'the man for others' and his understanding of the 'imitatio Christi' led him to his understanding of 'responsibility', his most important ethical concept.

According to Eberhard Bethge, the phrase 'Jesus, the man for others' is a new Christological title for Bonhoeffer;

a title which "...renews the 'imitatio Christi'".¹ In imitation of Christ the disciple must also act responsibly toward the world, he must be there for others. The disciple must conform to the form of Christ in the world, acting in absolute freedom on the one hand but accepting absolute responsibility for his actions on the other. Participation in this 'being for others' is the source of the Christian's transcendence. According to Bonhoeffer,

The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is within reach in any given situation.²

This places the meaning of transcendence completely into the historical human context and not outside of life beyond the individual or in the conscience, but rather in very concrete human self-sacrifice in imitation of Christ. Participation in the being of Christ or conformation to Christ or allowing Christ to take form in the world are therefore all different aspects of discipleship and of ethical transcendence. The man for others has no concern either for himself or for preserving religion but through his acceptance of responsibility he transcends his particular existence. This has nothing

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1. Bethge, E.. "Bonhoeffer's Christology and His 'Religionless Christianity'" in Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. 23, No. 1, Fall 1967; also reprinted in Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age, ed. by P. Vorkinck, p. 71.
 2. Bonhoeffer, D.. "Outline for a Book" in Letters and Papers From Prison, page 389.

to do with a metaphysical¹ notion of transcendence as was the goal of the 'imitatio' in the Middle Ages, but rather it is transcendence within our own historicity. Our relationship with God "...is not a religious relationship to a supreme being, absolute in power and goodness,...but a new life for others, through participation in the being of God".²

Bonhoeffer's understanding of 'religionless Christianity' and discipleship has led him to a theology of 'responsibility'. This is supported not only by Bonhoeffer's thought but also by his life of discipleship to Christ in a world that for him had 'come of age' and forced him to be a Christian in a non-religious conspiracy.

After the war in Germany conservative Churchmen refused to recognize Bonhoeffer as a Christian martyr among the many others that had died for their Christian convictions. They refused because they saw Bonhoeffer die, not for the Church, but for the political resistance and conspiracy against Hitler. He did not die for religion but rather he died for the life of the world as did our Lord so many years before.

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1. The rejection of 'metaphysical thinking' does not lead Bonhoeffer to a secular God. He uses the term in a quite definite but limited sense. We must note this so as not to be misled by recent philosophical and theological trends which see anything that is not concrete as other-worldly. This is not what Bonhoeffer had in mind, for the concepts of faith, justification, rebirth and sanctification were very real for him and were not to be dismissed in a 'religionless Christianity'.
 2. Bonhoeffer, D.. Letters and Papers From Prison. Page 381.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have attempted to deal with the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer from a perspective other than that of ecclesiology or Christology. Both of these subjects have been only peripherally treated within this paper, because I had hoped to show that, while these two loci of Bonhoeffer's thought are admittedly important, there is yet a third locus of at least equal importance, namely, Bonhoeffer's understanding of discipleship. I have attempted to do this through an examination of discipleship as it has been seen theologically, historically, psychologically, biblically and ethically, and I have concluded that at the heart of Bonhoeffer's thought there is a Protestant form of the classic notion of the 'imitatio Christi'.

It has been suggested that "...Bonhoeffer was, and still is, the Feuerbach of what is called 'the new theology'"¹ and "...the John the Baptist of 'the New Reformation' ".² The time of Bonhoeffer's influence upon theology has been a time of questioning and reappraisal, but as we know, criticism achieves nothing if there is nothing to replace it. Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers From Prison have been used, abused and

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1. Mottu, H.. "Feuerbach and Bonhoeffer: Criticism of Religion and the Last Period of Bonhoeffer's Thought" in Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. 25, No. 1, Fall 1969, page 1.
 2. Gould, W. B.. The Worldly Christian. Page 80.

misused to justify a 'new' theology or morality, while on the other hand, The Cost of Discipleship, which offers the positive counterpoint which allowed Bonhoeffer to utter what he did in prison, is hardly used at all.

Eberhard Bethge pointed out that 'religionless Christianity' "...is in no sense a negative dismissal of tradition — though one must be prepared to risk that. Nor is it a cheapening of all that Bonhoeffer was pointing toward as most costly in The Cost of Discipleship. Rather, it is an even more demanding exposition of all that is costly. The Cost of Discipleship had ended with a strong chapter on the 'imitatio Christi'; Letters and Papers From Prison also finishes with a plea for the 'imitatio' in its hints at 'partaking in the sufferings of Christ in this world'. But all this involves not an ideal of passive giving in, but rather the most active regaining of access to the sources of real life".¹

'Access to the sources of real life' was for Bonhoeffer gained through accepting responsibility for others and the life of the world in a radical form of Christian deputyship. Bonhoeffer was once asked how he could take it upon himself to actively participate in the plot to kill Hitler. Bonhoeffer answered that if he as a pastor, saw a drunken driver racing at high speed down the street, he did not consider it his

1. Bethge, E.. "Turning Points in Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought" in Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. 23, No. 1, Fall 1967; also reprinted in Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age, ed. by P. Vorkinck, page 99.

only or his main duty to bury the victims of the madman, or to comfort the relatives; it was more important to wrench the wheel out of the drunkard's hands.¹ This free acceptance of responsibility is for Bonhoeffer done in obedience to the will of God and in imitation of Christ. This is the positive lesson we can learn from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The thoughts of a Christian martyr from a prison cell can be a guide to our own existence today. The 'imitatio Christi' is both the counterpoint to Bonhoeffer's 'world come of age' and the fulfillment of his 'religionless Christianity'.

The 'imitatio Christi' allows individuals to define themselves solely by their relationship with Jesus Christ and not through the use of any other foreign standard. It is, to put it simply, radically Christocentric. The 'imitatio Christi' calls for the rediscovery of a strong Christology.

Because of the 'imitatio', Jesus Christ must be seen as a real being and not as a mystical or metaphysical ideal. The 'imitatio' does not stress a future life but rather it stresses the beyond in the midst of life. The 'imitatio' allows Christ to remain 'the living Christ' rather than some abstract principle or figure out of the past. The 'imitatio' keeps Christ always in view in every decision one makes. Therefore, the 'imitatio Christi' is also the basis of all ethically responsible

1. As told by Bonhoeffer's friend, Otto Dudzus, in I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. by R. G. Smith and W. - D. Zimmermann, page 82.

action.

The 'imitatio Christi' is existential. It is for the individual without being individualistic and without being an individual plan for salvation. Through the dialectical process of the 'imitatio', Christ and the disciple become compatible, but since it does not support a doctrine of works or an analogy of being, it does not become a way from man to God. The 'imitatio Christi' is a challenge to risk 'cheap grace' and to live in the world as it really is. The 'imitatio' is a demand to resist inaction, complacency and self-righteousness. It allows no escape from the demands of concrete obedience and no refuge in pietism. The 'imitatio' combines obedience and belief for as Bonhoeffer says, 'only he who is obedient can believe'.

The 'imitatio Christi', although it is thoroughly biblical, is not a prescription for living. It cannot be satisfied with laws, rules or formulas, which become 'solutions' to problems, thereby limiting the possibilities and potential of every situation. The 'imitatio' is creative and dynamic; it is not repetitive and denies any and every form of literalism.

The 'imitatio Christi' allows us to live in the world in freedom. It frees Christ and allows grace to enter and rule our lives by eliminating or at least making unnecessary the forms and structures which can trap the Word of God. The 'imitatio' recognizes that there are no realms of reality which are separated from the grace of God.

Grace, however, is not 'cheap' for ethically we are forced to live and work in the dark. The 'imitatio' leaves the question of justification, of whether an action is actually in conformation to the form of Christ, to God alone. Ultimately, we must live by faith alone. The 'imitatio Christi' has put meaning back into our understanding of 'vocation'.

We can learn much from this Christian martyr whose death, according to Reinhold Niebuhr, would be "...a source of grace"¹. and whose life "...belongs to the modern Acts of the Apostles"². But can his life be normative for us? Can we live and act as he did, or must we see him from a distance through the tinted barriers time has erected between us? Can we not say both that he was right in what he did and we are right in what we do? Daniel Berrigan, a confirmed pacifist but whose own struggle closely parallels that of Bonhoeffer, had this to say,

We stand with Bonhoeffer, whose struggle
Was more protracted, who was faithful unto death.
We, too, wish to be both Christian and contemporary.
And this accounts, paradoxically,
For the difference between us and him.³

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1. Niebuhr, R., as quoted by Ved Mehta in The New Theologian. Page 173.
 2. Niebuhr, R.. "The Death of a Martyr" in Christianity and Crisis, Vol. V, No. 11, June 25, 1945, page 6.
 3. Berrigan, D.. "The Passion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer", a prose-poem in The Saturday Review, May 30, 1970.
For a comparison of Bonhoeffer and Berrigan see L. L. Rasmussen, "Daniel Berrigan and Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Parallels and Contrasts in Resistance" in Dialog, Vol. II, No. 4, 1972.

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