LAW, FREEDOM, AND CASUISTRY

IN THE ETHICS OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Problem of Ethical Uncertainty

In this thesis I do not intend to give a comprehensive survey of Bonhoeffer's ethical thought. Many of the terms and ideas which are central to his exposition of Christian ethics, are here only touched upon incidentally. My preoccupation, rather, is with this question: How should a Christian set about making an ethical decision? When confronted with a situation in which the course of action that his faith in Christ should lead him to follow is not immediately clear, how should the disciple of Jesus set about coming to a decision for action? Or to state the problem more theologically: How can we ascertain what God wills us to do?

It is, in my view, a lamentable weakness of Christian theology that it has not been able to formulate a statement of the ground and nature of Christian conduct that could gain general acceptance. Equally disturbing is the tendency of those who make pronouncements on social issues to formulate their policies, now from one point of view, and now from another. That this theological failure has practical repercussions is seen most markedly in the Church's inability to speak with one voice in the face of the terrifying prospect of massacre and devastation of nuclear war. Although individual Christians may desire of the church a more cogent witness than the muted

voice now heard, it is probable that the lack of an agreed theory of how Christians should proceed in making ethical decisions, no less than the complexity of the international situation, precludes a more radical and effective proposal.[1]

This, then, is a pressing problem for the Christian: What theological framework ought he to formulate to describe the process by which he has made ethical decisions in the past and which, in turn, will assist him in the future — especially in complex situations involving conflicting loyalties — in making decisions and pursuing courses of action consistent with his faith in Christ?

This problem of knowing the will of God for our existential context was one that vexed Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer does not assume that God's will for our conduct is self-evident or that our grasp of it an easy matter. He writes that "the Bible speaks of an entirely proper and necessary questioning with regard to the will of God..." (Ethics, p.161). And again, "It is not said at all that the will of God forces its way into the human heart without further ado, charged with the accent of uniqueness, or that it is simply obvious, and identical with whatever the heart may think." (Ethics, p.161).

Bonhoeffer states the purpose of his ethical studies in this manner: "We are asking what, on the assumption that life is given, is good for us as living men." (Ethics, p.185). The purpose of my research is to discover Bonhoeffer's solution to this perplexity of knowing God's will.

Bonhoeffer rightly occupies a large place in the thinking of contemporary Christian circles, not only because of his incisive

theological writings, but because of the testimony of his martyr's life and death. He himself regarded his chief contribution to Christian thought to be in the field of ethics. He alludes to this in a letter to his friend dated December 15, 1943. He writes, "I often feel as though the best part of my life was already past, and that all I have to do now is to finish my Ethics." (p.54).[2]

Although, owing to his early death at the age of thirty-nine in the Nazi extermination camp at Flossenburg, Bonhoeffer was not able to complete his Ethics, he has bequeathed us a mine of theological and ethical insights into the nature of the Christian life. Though the brevity of his years may have prevented him from formulating a thoroughly systematic exposition of Christian ethics, there is no question as to the value of devoting ourselves to his extant writings in our pursuit of an answer regarding the structure of Christian ethics.

2. Love: The Starting Point of Christian Ethics

The first prerequisite in discerning the will of God for our dealings with other persons is to allow God to reproduce in us the attitude and action he has shown towards us in our creation and preservation and redemption. Since God's creative and redemptive attitude and deed towards us has been pre-eminently revealed in Jesus Christ, we must say that the first condition of Christian behaviour is to be willing to demonstrate in our relation with others the gracious activity seen in Jesus.

The quality of that gracious attitude and action are most clearly seen in the fact that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). It is the unbounded readiness to sacrifice oneself to help the other — even if the other is an unlikable enemy who has injured us. God's posture towards us shown in Jesus is one of 'disinterested benevolence' (Nygren) or a 'steady attitude of good will'. (Caird). This is the attitude and sort of action for which agape stands. This is the type of conduct we are commanded by God to show others. As Jesus says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12).

Now, Bonhoeffer both in his writings and example testifies to his agreement with this statement of love as the starting point of Christian ethics. In Life Together he writes, "In the community of the Spirit there burns the bright love of brotherly service, agape." (p.21). In a letter from prison to his

friend, dated September 5, 1943 Bonhoeffer writes of the self-forgetful quality of love for others:

> It is remarkable how we think at such times about those we should not like to live without, and forget all about ourselves. It makes one realize how closely our lives are bound up with other people's, and in fact how our centre is outside of ourselves and how little we are individuals.
>
> (p.27)

In another letter dated May 15, 1943, he speaks of the outgoing concern that marks love for others. "I feel myself so much a part of you all that I know we live and bear everything in common, acting and thinking for one another even when we are separated." (p.18). In "Outline For a Book" also contained in the Letters and Papers from Prison Bonhoeffer describes our relation to God as "a new life for others, through participation in the Being of God." (p.165).

Bonhoeffer's life gives ample evidence that he embodied this love. In the midst of the travails and privations of his own imprisonment he felt concern for others — even the warders! He wrote on April 14, 1943, "I heard many people wishing each other a happy Easter, and one can hardly begrudge them it, for it is a hard life being a warder here." (p.14). His desire to move to other prison quarters was restrained by his compassion for the person who would have to replace him in his cell. He wrote on August 3, 1943, "I don't want to put in for a transfer to another floor, as it would not be fair on the other man who would have to be moved up here, and I don't suppose he would have any tomatoes, etc." (p.24).

Both by word and in personal deed Bonhoeffer showed that he saw concern and sacrificial service towards the brother for whom Christ died as the starting point for Christian conduct.

3. Law, Freedom (Inspiration), and Casuistry

It is sometimes thought that to point to the command to love as Christ has loved us is to have solved the ethical problem of discerning God's will for our conduct. But the matter is not so simply settled. Lofthouse sees this very clearly in his essay "Biblical Ethics". He writes:

> Certainly, it may be said, the Christian law is also the law of love; but to say that is to give little guidance to conduct, and even to do little justice to the New Testament itself. For what sort of conduct is meant when I am told to love my neighbour, or my enemy (Matt.5:44), or all men? What is to be understood by love in such a context?[3]

So we are pushed to ask: What does it mean concretely to love our neighbour or our enemy? Can the content of love be specified?

a. Law

There is strong biblical evidence to suggest that the content of love can be stipulated. Love is seemingly rescued from being only an unspecified attitude of good-will by concrete regulations in the Old Testament — the Decalogue — and the sayings of Jesus in the New Testament — the Sermon on the Mount, for example. It may be argued that these declarations tell us what love means concretely.[4]

Thus, to love a person would mean not to kill him, not to commit adultery against him, not to steal from him, not to lie to him, or not to appropriate his rightful property. Even more strenuously, to love him would be to refuse to harbour angry attitudes

or lustful thoughts or retaliatory ambitions against him. To do any of the things prohibited by the Decalogue or the sayings of Jesus is to fail to love. It would be a rejection of the divine will for conduct. To love, accordingly, is to fulfill the demands of the laws revealed by God and recorded in the Scriptures.

Now the problem is complicated by the fact that throughout the major part of its history the Church has sanctioned the deliberate performance of some of these apparently prohibited actions. Utilizing the concept of the just war, for example, the Church has at times instructed the faithful in the propriety of taking the life of an enemy. Moreover, there are scriptural passages, especially some of the Pauline condemnations of the law, that suggest that love may not be specified by any general rules.[5]

In the face of these facts, the question must be raised whether there do, in fact, exist divine absolute laws that specify how love must express itself in all situations. If the answer to the question — Is there an absolute law of God? — is 'no', then we are obliged to enquire further as to how we can know the content of God's command to love.

b. Freedom From Law: Inspiration

An answer that has found a place in ethical theory affirms that the Christian is free from law and knows God's will directly

by inspiration. There is no comprehensive code of laws that can possibly encompass all the possibilities of God's expectations for us. Rather, in each circumstance where the Christian finds it necessary to decide and act as a disciple, God through His Holy Spirit directly imparts the knowledge of his will. God 'in-Spirits' the disciple with an understanding of what love requires in that concrete situation. This knowledge could not be known in advance of the Christian's presence in the decisive situation; only when the believer is placed in a situation requiring decision does the Spirit convey the divine imperative for that particular believer in that particular situation.

There is no objective law that can claim to be the formulation of God's will. The law is, in reality, only a summary or generalization of how God has guided most men to act in the past. It holds no guarantees that future conduct should be the same. Love, then, is free from law; its content is instead revealed by God in each new situation.[6]

In this discussion of freedom it should be observed that freedom can be of two kinds. We may have freedom from law or we may have freedom from obedience. In freedom from law we are asserting that our moral decisions are not, and ought not to be, directed by an objective and universally valid code of regulations for the reason that no law can adequately convey what God requires of us. Since the law is inept in communicating the concrete will

of the living God the Christian must, on this view, depend on the inspired deliverances of the Holy Spirit for his knowledge of God's will.

But once the inspired command of God has been spoken to the disciple he may feel himself bound by his faith in Christ to obey unreservedly the divine command. He may feel himself as much under obligation as if he believed in an inflexible and universally binding revealed law. On this view, the disciple is free from law as the instrument by which he comes to know God's will, but he is not free from obedience to the command of God.

There is also a freedom from obedience in which the agent feels at liberty to deliberately deviate from what is clearly perceived to be the will of God. It is possible to hold that either the law or the inspired command is indeed the will of God but that human considerations make it unattractive or undesirable to obey that revealed will. If we hold that the disciple is permitted to consciously compromise or ignore the actual command of the living God once it has been declared, then we may speak of a freedom from obedience.

We shall return to this question of command, obedience, and compromise in my section entitled "Responsible Action and Obedience". For the time being we should note that when we refer to freedom in this thesis, unless otherwise indicated, we are talking about the epistemological problem of knowing God's will. It is

freedom from law as the way by which God's will is apprehended rather than freedom from obedience that is my primary concern.

c. Casuistry or Responsible Action

We turn our attention now to another alternative. So far we have considered two possibilities: Do we ascertain God's will for us here and now by reference to a revealed absolute law? Or: Do we know God's will for us here and now by his direct inspiration? If we are obliged to conclude that neither of these is the way we come to know the divine will, we are compelled to cast about for another explanation of how the Christian comes to know the will of God and makes his ethical decisions.

Besides the ethic of law and the ethic of inspiration we must place an ethic of adaptation or compromise that occupies a region between law and freedom but possesses a relation to both. This third ethic is related to the ethic of law because it believes the statements in the Bible governing the conduct of the disciple <u>are</u> laws — they are assertions of what God intended man to do when He created him. The formal laws revealed in the Scriptures are the divine specification of what love ideally means. In the face of the perplexing storms of life this ethical outlook has an anchor in the revealed law. But unlike the ethic of pure law it does not hold that the revealed law is directly and unqualifiedly applicable in all circumstances. Our sin and its legacy of a corrupted history annuls the possibility of directly implementing

the law in all situations and at all times. The tragedy and irony of man's existence lies in the fact that his sin has created an historical context where to perform God's law in its purity will result, on occasion, in more evil than would be produced by a human accommodation of the law to actual situations that transgresses the law's clear precepts. Fallen human nature that has idolized the self has produced an historical nexus that makes the direct application of the law not only difficult or impossible, but, on occasion, morally undesirable.

Once having acknowledged this inability to implement the law directly in all circumstances, we are projected into a state of uncertainty regarding precise moral decisions. Once granted that the law is not always directly applicable, then we are not able to say in advance of our participation in crises what our decision and action must be. We must depend on the inspired command of God addressed to us in that situation to direct us regarding the extent of the law's relevance; or on the calculations of our reason; or on some combination of inspiration and reflection. However the accommodation of the law to our circumstances is made, it is clear that absolute confidence regarding our choice has vanished. This being set free from absolute adherence to the requirements of the law causes this third ethic to resemble the ethic of inspiration. But whereas in the ethic of inspiration the freedom from law is

total, in this third moral theory the freedom from law is only relative.

This third way I call a casuistic ethic. It is true that whenever Bonhoeffer refers to casuistry he does so in a deprecating way. But defined as I have, as the middle ground between law and freedom, 'casuistry' does present itself as an appropriate term. For casuistry is the process in which general laws are applied to concrete situations to ascertain what our specific act should be on that occasion.[7] The commands of God in the scriptures are expressed as universal laws; the place where we actually stand is the concrete circumstance to which the law is related. Out of the confrontation of the law and our standing place, and under the guidance of God, must issue our decision and deed.

A further word about the notion of law in this thesis: The term 'law' has been a highly controversial one, not only in ethical debate but in disputes about justification. I want to make clear what I shall have in mind when I speak of **law.** By an ethic of law I mean the conviction that the way we should behave as Christians has been expressed in rational words and these words arranged in the form of consistent commands are sufficient to guide our conduct. To believe in law is not to imply necessarily that man is thoroughly capable of fulfilling the law. It is possible to keep a place for man's weakness and sin that causes him to fall into temptation and transgress the moral law. But

the divine will even when violated is known, because God has revealed it in a verbal form that adequately conveys what He wants all men to do in all circumstances.

I shall approach Bonhoeffer's writings with these questions chiefly in mind: 1) Does Bonhoeffer believe that we come to know God's will for us by His revelation of law, that is, general rules that are absolutely binding on all Christians in all situations? 2) Does Bonhoeffer believe that God's will is known by inspiration, that is, the direct deliverances of God's Holy Spirit addressed to particular situations and not susceptible of generalization into any universally valid law? 3) Does Bonhoeffer believe that God's will is known by a process in which the ideal law of God is related to the concrete circumstances in which we find ourselves in such a way that there emerges a command or direction for that particular situation?

We shall from time to time be obliged to examine passages, written with other purposes in mind, as guides to the solution implicit in Bonhoeffer's ethical thought. Undoubtedly I shall be distorting the original intention of some passages, but I hope that, in the main, I shall be accurately describing the moral theory that underlies his writing.

In order to circumscribe the enquiry I propose first of all to isolate those passages in his works that deal with three

areas of life that provide what we may call 'test-cases' for Christian morality. We shall first of all examine Bonhoeffer's thought on the rights of human life, asking whether life is inviolable under all circumstances. Since the sixth commandment of the Decalogue is framed as the prohibition "Thou shalt not kill" I shall attempt to focus this study by enquiring of Bonhoeffer, "Is there an absolute divine law prohibiting killing?"

Then we shall give our attention to the area of sex. The seventh commandment of the Decalogue is also expressed as a prohibition: "Thou shalt not commit adultery". I shall be asking of Bonhoeffer an answer to this question, "Is there an absolute divine law prohibiting adultery?"

And finally I shall direct our enquiry into the realm of truth and truth-telling and lying. The ninth commandment of the Decalogue is a prohibition of falsehood: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Here I shall ask for Bonhoeffer's answer to the question, "Is there an absolute divine law prohibiting lying?"

The answers to these questions should enable us to see whether Bonhoeffer possesses a consistent ethical view-point and, if so, should indicate to us whether it is an ethic of law, or freedom, or casuistry. Then I shall proceed to a consideration of the theoretical passages, especially in the Ethics, to see how Bonhoeffer formulates the nature of Christian conduct. Finally, I shall pass to some brief summary and appraisal of

Bonhoeffer's ethical theory.

I should point out that it was my original intention to have an additional section in chapters II, III and IV in which I would survey Bonhoeffer's views in the minor works, for example, Life Together, Creation and Fall, and Temptation. But there was so very little in the minor works that contributed to the question under discussion in this thesis, that I was obliged to drop this section. Relevant passages from the minor works are, accordingly, inserted throughout wherever appropriate.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1] cf., Edward Duff, The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches (London: Longmans, Green, 1956).

> The World Council of Churches is permanently mindful of the importance of a common, coherent basis for its social pronouncements. Stimulating an ecumenical dialogue that would engender a consensus on the fundamental criteria of social criticism has been a continuing responsibility of the Study Department.
>
> (p.110)

> The inquiry on the social relevance of the Bible and its use in appraising concrete issues of justice among men and nations is one that cannot indefinitely be filed away as incomplete. No mere subject for a common-room causerie among theologians and scripture scholars, it is immediately connected with the desire, frequently expressed at ecumenical gatherings, for a coherent, commonly accepted foundation—a philosophy, if you will—on which to base World Council pronouncements on economic and political questions.
>
> (p.114)

[2] References to letters are all from Letters and Papers from Prison (London: Collins Fontana Books, 1959) unless otherwise indicated.

[3] W. F. Lofthouse, "Biblical Ethics", in T. W. Manson, ed., A Companion to the Bible (Edinburgh: Clark, 1950), p.348.

[4] Throughout this thesis 'law' refers to the revealed law in the Bible. It is, of course, possible to hold that there is an eternal natural law derived not from special revelation but from the exercise of natural reason upon existence so

that the facts of human nature and the courses of action that lead to the fulfillment of this nature are discovered.

But Bonhoeffer makes no place for natural law in his ethical scheme. He writes in the chapter "On the Possibility of the Word of the Church to the World" in the Ethics:

> Whatever the Church's word to the world may be, it must always be both law and gospel. This implies a denial of the view that the Church can speak to the world on the basis of some particular rational or natural-law knowledge which she shares with the world, that is to say, with an occasional temporary disregard for the gospel. The Church of the Reformation, unlike the Catholic Church, cannot do this. (p.321)

[5] cf., "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:14)

"For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified." (Romans 10:4)

[6] Duff in Social Thought gives a good summary of this ethic of freedom from law or inspiration:

> As described by Dr. Oldham, 'the ethic of inspiration' insists that the fundamental and characteristic Christian moral attitude is not obedience to fixed norms or to a moral code but a living response to a living person, a fellowship with God who is sovereignly free and whose Will is sought for a present personal decision. (p.94)

> In such a situation the spirit of Christ—'which by nature is a continuous, dynamic event'—is imparted to the believer enabling him to make practical decisions of obedience to the divine Will in the concrete circumstances of daily life. (p.102)

[7] One of the most vexing decisions I have had to make in this thesis is the proper designation of the third ethical alternative, the ethic that embraces both law and freedom. I have, with considerable hesitancy, used the term 'casuistry' even though Bonhoeffer refuses to sanction this term in his ethical vocabulary. In the Ethics he mentions "a dangerous legalistic casuistry which destroys liberty of faith" (p.258) and tells us that "The concretely Christian ethic is beyond formalism and casuistry." (p.23). Another possibility is the term 'compromise' which conveys the notion of adjustable principles. But this word is also distasteful to Bonhoeffer. He tells us in the Ethics, "Christ does not make compromises....And in Jesus Christ there is neither radicalism nor compromise, but there is the reality of God and men." (p.87). The term Bonhoeffer uses to designate this third way is 'responsible action'.

Now the point is well taken as to why I have chosen to designate Bonhoeffer's ethics by a term he himself repudiates. The answer is simply that I wish to set my work in the context of present ethical discussion. The term 'casuistry' in its original and strict sense does represent something quite clear: the adaptation of principles and general laws to concrete instances. 'Responsible action', however, is an ambiguous term that depends for its meaning on who is using it. The nomist feels the only responsible action is strict adherence to the law; the antinomist feels responsible action is only dependence on the grace of God. For Bonhoeffer

it means something else again.

'Compromise' might have been a suitable term except that it carries too much the sense of weak capitulation of conviction to expediency. Edward LeRoy Long, however, (who also sought to revive the accurate use of 'casuistry' in ethical discussion) uses 'compromise' in the title of his book on ethics, Conscience and Compromise.

In the interest of more or less ready identification of an ethical viewpoint, I have chosen to employ the term 'casuistry' understanding this as the equivalent of Bonhoeffer's term 'responsible action'.

II. LIFE — IS THERE AN ABSOLUTE LAW PROHIBITING KILLING?

1. Preliminary: Posing the Question

According to Bonhoeffer are Christian ethical decisions made by absolute obedience to universally valid laws; or in freedom from law by direct divine inspiration in each new ethical situation; or by a casuistic process in which moral law is accomodated to actual circumstances.

The first test case to be analyzed in the search for an answer is the case of life and its inviolability. If Bonhoeffer believes in an ethic of absolute law we should find him saying that there is an absolute law prohibiting killing and under no circumstances is the disciple of Jesus morally permitted to take life.

If Bonhoeffer subscribes to an ethic of freedom from law or inspiration, we should find the claim that whether or not a Christian is entitled by God to kill another can never be answered in advance of a critical situation. It is possible to conceive that under certain conditions love for neighbour in response to the call of God will demand that we kill another person.

Evidence for a casuistic ethic would consist of the affirmation of an ideal divine law prohibiting killing coupled with the recognition that situations may arise in which the will

of God is done and responsibility to others is discharged by choosing to transgress the ideal intention of God by assuming guilt in the taking of life.

We turn now to a survey of Bonhoeffer's writings in order to discern his attitude towards life and killing and whether or not they are governed by law.

2. Life and Killing in The Cost of Discipleship

The data in The Cost of Discipleship for establishing an answer to the question, "Is there an absolute divine law prohibiting killing?", consist largely of those chapters which are an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. There are three chapters here of fundamental importance for our enquiry in addition to a brief treatment of the beatitude on peacemakers. The first is "The Brother", an exposition of Jesus' saying regarding the act of killing and the attitude of anger in Matthew 5:21-26. The second chapter, "Revenge" deals with Jesus words about the lex talionis and non-resistance in Matthew 5:38-42. The third is "The Enemy — The Extraordinary", a treatment of Jesus' saying about love for the enemy in Matthew 5:43-48.

We shall begin with an examination of "The Brother". Bonhoeffer writes:

> The first law which Jesus commends to his disciples is the one which forbids murder and entrusts their brother's welfare to their keeping. The brother's life is a divine ordinance, and God alone has power over life and death. There is no place for the murderer among the people of God.
>
> (p.115-6)

On the face of it, Bonhoeffer appears in these words to be affirming an absolute prohibition against killing. He says first that the saying of Jesus concerning the brother constitutes a law. Then he reinforces this position by asserting that "The brother's life is a divine ordinance." (p.115). God decrees that certain states of affairs have absolute sanction and protection given

them in creation. The Brother's life is such an inviolate condition, humanly speaking. Only God who creates life may dispose of it; he does not delegate this right over life to men.

It should be noted that in The Cost of Discipleship Bonhoeffer does not make a distinction between 'murder' and 'killing'. The terms can be used interchangeably: all killing of the neighbour is murder. We shall see that later in the Ethics Bonhoeffer distinguished between 'arbitrary killing' which is the deliberate destruction of innocent life and killing on the grounds of 'unconditional necessity'. This is, in effect, the customary distinction drawn between murder ('arbitrary killing') and justified killing ('unconditional necessity'), but in The Cost of Discipleship no such distinction is drawn.

Lest a loophole for the taking of life be found by interpreting this prohibition so that it applies only to the fellow-Christian and is not therefore universally binding, Bonhoeffer tells us, "In this context 'brother' means more than 'fellow-Christian': for the follower of Jesus there can be no limit as to who is his neighbour." (p.116).

But, then, most cryptically, Bonhoeffer adds, "except as his Lord decides." (p.116). What is the purpose of this qualification? Are we to infer that on occasion the Lord may decide that someone is not our brother and therefore may be killed?

In the context of the whole of The Cost of Discipleship and especially within the exposition of the Sermon on the Mount such an exception to the prohibition of killing scarcely seems a possible construction. To admit such an exception would be inconsistent with Bonhoeffer's whole direction in this book that constitutes a call to radical obedience.

We can only surmise that Bonhoeffer is here guilty of a rhetorical flourish that confuses the main direction of his thought. The next sentence substantiates my treatment of this proviso that seems to dilute the strength of Jesus' saying. Bonhoeffer writes:

> He*is forbidden to commit murder under pain of divine judgement. For him the brother's life is a boundary which he dare not pass.
>
> (p.116)

We may think that such an absolute condemnation of killing is too strenuous a command for the disciple; we may feel that under sufficient provocation we ought to be justified in taking an aggressor's life. But Bonhoeffer will not here allow us this possibility. Far from the law against killing being too severe, it is not sufficiently radical for the disciple! The prohibition covers not only the overt act of killing but is extended even to the interior attitude of the disciple towards the other person. In Bonhoeffer's view Jesus is to be taken not only seriously but literally. Bonhoeffer approves the literal meaning of Jesus' words; "Even anger is enough to overstep

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*[the disciple]

the mark, still more the casual angry word (Raca), and most of all the deliberate insult of our brother ('Thou fool')." (p.116).

The reason that such an interior attitude or 'mental act' like anger comes under condemnation is not primarily because it sullies the purity of heart of the person who would be a disciple. The Christian faith is not essentially concerned with this self-edification. The interior act of anger is repudiated because it is an offensive act against the brother. Bonhoeffer explains it like this, "The angry word is a blow struck at our brother, a stab at his heart: it seeks to hit, to hurt and to destroy." (p.116). And again, "Not just the fact that I am angry, but the fact that there is somebody who has been hurt, damaged and disgraced by me, who 'has a cause against me', erects a barrier between me and God." (p.117). The condemnation of hostile interior attitudes on the ground of their outward social damage is found also in Life Together: "...there is no sin in thought, word, or deed, no matter how personal or secret, that does not inflict injury upon the whole fellowship." (p.79).[1]

This chapter presents us with a perspective on the inviolability of life that can be understood only as a divine absolute prohibition of killing.

We turn now to an examination of the chapter entitled "Revenge", which is an exposition of Jesus' saying on the lex talionis and non-resistance.

The usual interpretation of these "Ye have heard...but I say unto you" sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is that Jesus is here contrasting the law of the Old Testament with the new "better righteousness" which his coming inaugurates. The Old Testament law — in its formal expression if not in its original intention in the mind of God — is being abrogated in favour of the new way of Jesus.

But Bonhoeffer will not have it this way. Speaking of the Old Testament law of retribution he claims that Jesus "recognizes this saying, like the sixth commandment, as the veritable law of God. This law, like all the others, is not to be abrogated, but fulfilled to the last iota". (p.126). In the subsequent exposition of this text that follows, it becomes clear how Bonhoeffer is able to take such a position. He does not regard the injunction as it stands — "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" — as law that is universally and eternally binding on the people of God; rather, the divine purpose of retribution that lies behind it constitutes the law. In this view, the law actually consists of the proposition, "Thou shalt requite evil — in the proper way" and Bonhoeffer's exposition reveals that the proper way to requite evil is to cease to requite by conventional coercive retaliation. This is the proper retribution upon the evil doer that is required of the disciple.

Now I cannot but feel that this is strained exegesis motivated in part by Bonhoeffer's high estimate of the Old Test-

ament scriptures and his unwillingness to employ the notion of abrogation with respect to them. The clear meaning of the saying is that the law of retribution of the Old Testament is being superseded in the saying of Jesus by his own way of non-retribution.

But let us note that this desire of Bonhoeffer's to retain the validity of the Old Testament law and to see it as essentially of the same quality as the teaching of Jesus, serves to underscore the nature of Jesus sayings as law. For there can be no question that with the Old Testament precepts we are moving within the realm of law; and when Bonhoeffer regards the saying of Jesus as an extension of the Old Testament's intention, he is, in effect, assigning the same status of law to the sayings of Jesus.

"Resist not him who is evil". There is no equivocation as to the meaning of this saying of our Lord in Bonhoeffer's treatment. It signifies quite literally that the Church "must patiently endure aggression.. Otherwise evil will be heaped upon evil". (p.127).

Bonhoeffer will not permit the Reformation softening of this hard saying by allowing that Christ's command of non-resistance applies to the Christian only when he is acting in a personal capacity, but not when he is exercising an office ordained by God such as that of ruler or magistrate of the state. The Reformers had taught that when we are office bearers:

> We are not only freed from obligation to eschew violence, but if we want to act in a genuine spirit of

> love we must do the very opposite, and meet force with force in order to check the assault of evil. It was along these lines that the Reformers justified war and other legal sanctions against evil. (p.128)

Bonhoeffer is explicit in his rejection of this Reformation ethical dichotomy: "This distinction between person and office is wholly alien to the teaching of Jesus. He says nothing about that. He addresses his disciples as men who have left all to follow him, and the precept of non-violence applies equally to private life and official duty. He is the Lord of all life, and demands undivided allegiance." (p.128-9).

Moreover, Bonhoeffer sees the practical impossibility of distinguishing a Christian's role as a private disciple and his role as a public servant. Although this distinction may be made theoretically, it has no more objective reality than the abstraction 'economic man' or 'aesthetic man' or 'political man'. It is always the indivisible person who acts and all his acts will be both personal commitments and public influences. He writes:

> Am I ever acting only as a private person or only in an official capacity? If I am attacked am I not at once the father of my children, the pastor of my flock, and e.g. a government official? Am I not bound for that very reason to defend myself against every attack, for reason of responsibility to my office? And am I not also always an individual, face to face with Jesus, even in the performance of my official duties? Am I not therefore obliged to resist every attack just because of my responsibility for my office?

There can be only one answer to this dilemma. The Christian must always act as the disciple whose face is turned only towards

his Lord whom he is following. He will, accordingly, always be acting as a solitary individual. Bonhoeffer asks:

> Is it right to forget that the follower of Jesus is always utterly alone, always the individual, who in the last resort can only decide and act for himself? (p.129)

But in the providence of God, the disciple will discover that only this single-minded allegiance to Christ can result in consequences that are ultimately a blessing to those whom we love and for whom we are responsible. Bonhoeffer asks the question, anticipating an affirmative answer, "Don't we act most responsible on behalf of those entrusted to our care if we act in this aloneness?" (p.129).[2]

In this treatment of "Revenge" we are again given a view of the sanctity of life that marks it off from deliberate destruction. God forbids us to kill even our enemy.

The next passage for our consideration is Bonhoeffer's chapter on "The Enemy — The Extraordinary".

In his exposition of Jesus' saying "Resist not him who is evil", Bonhoeffer has spoken of the Christian's patient endurance of aggression; his refusal to retaliate by means of force against the one who has done him evil. Now Bonhoeffer turns to the exposition of the saying "Love your enemies" where the disciple is enjoined to take up an attitude of constant good-will towards his enemy and to work for his well-being.

Bonhoeffer sees this as an unqualified law, universal and binding in all circumstances. There can never be any compromise with this absolute law. No inspired command of God will ever permit us to hate our enemy, nor should human calculation ever condone any compromise with this law of love.

Bonhoeffer's exposition of this saying of Jesus is in some respects difficult to follow. At least part of the difficulty has its source in Bonhoeffer's undue regard for the intrinsic significance of the Old Testament text, as distinguished from its significance as preparation for the gospel.

Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy' but I say to you, love your enemies..." (Matthew 5:43-4).

T. W. Manson informs us in The Sayings of Jesus the neighbour referred to in the Old Testament law in Lev. 19:18 is only the fellow-Israelite. "But Jewish literature is ransacked in vain for evidence that such a conclusion [hate your enemy] is explicitly drawn." (p.161). Manson draws the inference that the phrase "and hate your enemies" which detracts from the sharpness of the antithesis — "The law says, Thou shalt love thy neighbour. I say, Love your enemies" — is an interpolation. Bonhoeffer's conservative approach to scripture will not allow him to concede this. Jesus actually said that the law spoken to the men of old time prescribed hate towards the enemy. But, in

fact, the Old Testament — as Bonhoeffer points out — enjoins love of the enemy (Ex. 23:4f; Prov. 25:21f; Gen. 45: 1ff; I Sam. 24:7; II Kings 6:22).

Bonhoeffer's solution to this perplexity is to assert that the enemy to whom Christ refers is different from the enemy whom the Old Testament scriptures bid us to love. "But Jesus is not talking of ordinary enmity, but of that which exists between the People of God and the world." (p.132). This enmity between God and the world of idols, Bonhoeffer supposes to be sanctioned by the Old Testament and approved by Jesus:

> It is not this enmity which Jesus condemns, for then he would have condemned the whole history of God's dealings with his people. On the contrary, he affirms the old covenant. He is as concerned as the Old Testament with the defeat of the enemy and the victory of the People of God.
>
> (p.132)

Bonhoeffer's exegesis developed along these lines, then requires him to 'spiritualize' or 'mythologize' the saying of Jesus, by discovering a true hidden meaning other than the plain surface meaning. That 'hatred' which Bonhoeffer holds the Old Testament commands God's people should bear towards the idol-worshipping enemies of God, must now be understood to mean 'overcoming by love'. He says:

> No, the real meaning of this saying is that Jesus is again releasing his disciples from the political associations of the old Israel. From now on there can be no more wars of faith. The only way to overcome our enemy is by loving him.
>
> (p.132)

The conclusion Bonhoeffer wishes us to draw is this. Both the Old Testament law and the command of Jesus demand hatred of the enemy, that is, defeat of idolaters. The law is the same in both covenants. But the manner in which the law is to be fulfilled differs. Whereas in the old covenant violent subjugation of idolaters was necessary, in the new covenant the enemy is overcome by loving him.

It is important, for our purpose, to press the question whether the act of love which is uncompromisable, is ever consistent with the act of killing. Can we be said to love our enemy while we kill him, albeit for noble motives? Do we love our enemy when in our solicitude for his soul endangered by heresy, we terminate his life? Are we loving our enemy when our concern for his innocent victims leads us to kill him? Are loving and killing of the same person compatible?

The answer to this question has been supplied, of course, by the other expositions of "The Brother" and "Revenge". We have seen there is an absolute prohibition of killing for the disciple. The command to love the enemy cannot contradict this absolute law, but serves to extend the limits of the disciple's conduct towards the enemy. The disciple is not only to refrain from killing his enemy, he is to work positively to enable him to become the person God desires.

In his exposition of the Beatitudes, Bonhoeffer turns

to the promised benediction of those who make peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." (Matthew 5:9). About this call and promise of Christ, Bonhoeffer declares:

> The followers of Jesus have been called to peace. When he called them they found their peace, for he is their peace. But now they are told that they must not only have peace but make it. And to that end they renounce all violence and tumult. In the cause of Christ nothing is to be gained by such methods. His kingdom is one of peace, and the mutual greeting of his flock is a greeting of peace. His disciples keep the peace by choosing to endure suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others.
>
> (p.102)

These words certainly give the impression of constituting a thorough-going rejection by the disciple of all violence and killing. The only escape from this inference lies in the sentence "In the cause of Christ, nothing is to be gained by such [violent] methods." What is the meaning of this proviso? Is Bonhoeffer proposing a kind of 'religious' dualism in which the Christian is enjoined to practice patient non-violence when pursuing religious or sacred purposes connected with the advancement of Christ's kingly rule; but is entitled and even obligated to employ coercion when acting in a secular capacity as a citizen in the world? We might suppose that this is what Bonhoeffer had in mind here were it not for his repeated stress on the Christian's involvement in the world, as a Christian. He says, for example, "The fellowship between Jesus and his disciples covered every aspect of their daily life." (p.228). The conventional sacred-sec-

ular dichotomy is rejected by Bonhoeffer. He speaks approvingly of Luther's discovery:

> The only way to follow Jesus was by living in the world. Hitherto the Christian life had been the achievement of a few choice spirits under the exceptionally favourable conditions of monasticism; now it is a duty laid on every Christian living in the world. The commandment of Jesus must be accorded perfect obedience in one's daily vocation of life.
>
> (p.40)

There is another passage that could be possibly interpreted so as to give the impression that Bonhoeffer recommends what I shall call a 'spatial dualism' of church and world. On this view Christ's command of unqualified love with its corollaries of non-violence and the other precepts of the Sermon on the Mount is restricted to the followers of Christ in their internal life in the Christian community and has no application to the life lived even by Christians in the unconverted world. The passage in question is as follows:

> If we took the precept of non-resistance as an ethical blueprint for general application, we should indeed be indulging in idealistic dreams: we should be dreaming of a utopia with laws which the world would never obey. To make non-resistance a principle for secular life is to deny God, by undermining his gracious ordinance for the preservation of the world.
>
> (p.129-30)

The probable meaning here, however, is that the command of love and non-violence is absolutely binding upon the disciple who has, through faith in Christ, entered the Kingdom of God, whether he finds himself acting in the church or in the world. But the Christian ought not to expect the unconverted world to

act with constant good will and benevolence. Plans for the world based on this premise are bound to be frustrated, for the unconverted world has not appropriated the grace that enables men to love as Christ has loved them. The disciple, however, to whom grace has been given by Christ, is called at all times and in all places and in all capacities to shed abroad the love of God.

This understanding of the passage is borne out by some further comments that Bonhoeffer makes on the relation of the Church to the state in the chapter called "The Visible Community". Bonhoeffer says in this context; "God...has so ordered life that the world exercises dominion by force and Christ and Christians conquer by service". (p.235). The only distinction is between the conduct of the world and the conduct of the realm of grace, the Church. There is no distinction within the Christian's behaviour itself depending on whether he is looking inwardly to the Church or outwardly to the world. The Christian's conduct is consistently characterized by love, at least in his intention, no matter whether the setting in which he is placed is the Church or the world.

This conviction is supported by what follows:

> It does not matter what others do, but what we do....On no account must evil occur within the Church. Once again, St. Paul is talking to the Christians, not to the State. His concern is that the Christians should persevere in repentance and obedience wherever they may be and whatever conflict should threaten them.
>
> (p.236)

While on the subject of theological and ethical dualism, I should point out again Bonhoeffer's rejection of what I shall call 'vocational dualism'. It is acknowledged by nearly all Christians that the ethics of the Kingdom of God enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount are applicable only to those who by faith in Christ live in the Kingdom. The question that confronts us is whether the Christian is under obligation to act always in accordance with the rigorous commands of the Sermon on the Mount even when he is moving in the world among those who do not recognize the revelation in Christ and do not abide by his way of love.

A Reformation answer to this question consisted of drawing a distinction between a Christian's actions in a personal capacity and his actions in a public capacity where there is a responsibility for others. In his personal acts the Christian is obliged to follow the way of love as it is specified in the commandments of Jesus, but in his acts performed in the discharge of a responsible office the Christian is not only permitted but enjoined by the Creator to employ coercion and killing in restraining sin and disorder.

Against this person-office dichotomy Bonhoeffer says, "Christ addresses his disciples as men who have left all to follow him, and the precept of non-violence applies equally to private life and official duty. He is the Lord of all life, and demands undivided allegiance". (p.129).

Bonhoeffer has moved beyond traditional dualisms of any sort no matter whether they be of a religious, spatial or vocational type, or whether they be derived historically from Medieval Scholastic, Lutheran or Enthusiast. In a section entitled "Thinking in Terms of Two Spheres" in his Ethics Bonhoeffer comments:

> It may be difficult to break the spell of this thinking in terms of two spheres, but it is nevertheless quite certain that it is in profound contradiction to the thought of the Bible and to the thought of the Reformation, and that consequently it aims wide of reality. There are not two realities, but only one reality, and that is the reality of God, which has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world. Sharing in Christ we stand at once in both the reality of God and the reality of the world.
>
> (p.63-4)[3]

The final passage to be examined in The Cost of Discipleship is found in a chapter called "The Great Divide", where Bonhoeffer gives an exposition of Matthew 7:13-23. In the course of his explanation of the 'narrow gate' he says:

> To believe the promise of Jesus that his followers shall possess the earth, and at the same time to face our enemies unarmed and defenceless, preferring to incur injustice rather than to do wrong ourselves, is indeed a narrow way.
>
> (p.170)

As it stands this is an unequivocal rejection of all violent resistance. The command of Jesus to 'resist not evil' is here being taken as an absolute law that ought to govern the Christian's every meeting with the enemy who oppresses and destroys.

3. Life and Killing in the Ethics

In the section "Inheritance and Decay" in the chapter "Ethics as Formation" Bonhoeffer analyses the historical heritage of the West and finds its unifying centre only in Christ. He writes "Jesus Christ has made of the west a historical unit.... the unity of the west is not an idea but a historical reality, of which the sole foundation is Christ." (p.29). Then Bonhoeffer makes the point that war in the West may be justified to the extent that it seeks to maintain this unity. He tells us, "Even the wars of the west have the unity of the west as their purpose. They are not wars of extermination and destruction like the wars of pre-Christian times." (p.29). Rather than an absolute condemnation of war we find quite the contrary; a certain type of war is given divine sanction. Bonhoeffer informs us that in the West, "War now always remained a kind of appeal to the arbitration of God, which both sides were willing to accept." (p.30).

It is clear that Bonhoeffer does not here support an absolute moral law that prohibits the taking of life in all circumstances. He views war not simply as a tragic lapse of man into sin and hostility, but as a necessity imposed on occasion by historical reality upon even men of good will.

But it is important to note that Bonhoeffer's justification of war is not an unqualified warrant. He has intimated that war derives its sanction from the motive of unity for the West. Limits are thereby imposed on the exercise of war. The character of these

limits is defined by the cause for which the war is undertaken and by the extent of the warfare. War which is motivated by the attainment of specific purposes, for example, the unity of the West, and which is restricted in its scope to the achievement of these ends, has a certain legitimacy. War which seeks to be total, however, war which fails to recognize the limits, is unconditionally forbidden. Total war is described by Bonhoeffer in this way:

> Total war makes use of all conceivable means which may possibly serve the purpose of national self-preservation. Anything which is of advantage to one's own cause is rightful and permissible. (p.29)

In distinction to this total war which is condemned Bonhoeffer describes the features of justifiable Western wars in the following way:

> Western wars have always distinguished between means of warfare which are permissible and rightful and those which are prohibited and criminal. It was belief in a just, divine government of the world which made it possible to dispense with the perhaps effective but certainly un-Christian practices of killing the innocent-torture, extortion, and the rest. (p.29-30)

We can easily deduce from these statements that Bonhoeffer's judgements are determined by a theory of conduct that envisages a Christian's freedom from a law that purports to be absolutely binding and universally applicable. Whether this freedom is relative as in a casuistic ethic that still holds to an objective law as in some way normative, or whether this freedom is total as in an ethic of inspiration where only the existential command of God

can guide moral behaviour, is not here stipulated. But as we go on we shall have occasion to see that it is a casuistic ethic that underlies Bonhoeffer's ethical judgements.

In the same section "Inheritance and Decay" Bonhoeffer develops the concept of the 'restrainer'. This is the κατέχων of 2 Thessalonians 2:7 which Bonhoeffer describes as "the force of order, equipped with great physical strength which effectively blocks the way of those who are about to plunge into the abyss." (p.44). More specifically, the 'restrainer' is the force exercised by the state in the interest of order. As Bonhoeffer says, "The 'restrainer' is the power of the State to establish and maintain order." (p.44).

The 'restrainer' has an ambivalent status; it is under God's condemnation for sin, and yet it is an ally of the Church and performs God's work. "The 'restrainer' itself is not God; it is not without guilt; but God makes use of it in order to preserve the world from destruction." (p.44).

It is obvious that with this espousal of the doctrine of the 'restrainer' — "the forces of order...which set due limits to evil" — Bonhoeffer has rejected the ethical position that affirms that Christians are governed by an unconditional law that prohibits coercion and killing. For the 'restrainer' employs the sword in the accomplishment of its task. At the same time, there is evidence that this permission to take life is not the original intention of God for man. The 'restrainer' shares in guilt,

that is, even while it does God's will by taking life in situations of historical necessity, it is violating the antecedent law of God.

We can only conclude that Bonhoeffer's judgements are being made here on the assumptions of a casuistic ethic. There does exist a divine law, "Thou shalt not kill", but when the demonic powers unleashed by man's sin threaten all order and life, then it is required by God that Christians ally themselves with the state's force and suppress the destructive evil doers.

In a section entitled "Justification and the Healing of the Wound" contained under the general heading of "Guilt, Justification and Renewal" Bonhoeffer deals with the possibilities of forgiveness between hostile nations. Exact retribution, the implementation of 'an eye for an eye', should be left to God. To achieve the healing of the nations that is a faint shadow of the forgiveness given by Christ, there must be a "waiving of the demand that the guilty man shall fully expiate the wrong he has committed." (p.53).

But what if the offer of forgiveness and the invitation to participate in the restoration of order and justice is rejected? Bonhoeffer answers, "If this is not achieved, if wrong still rules unhindered and still inflicts new wounds, then, of

course, there can be no question of this kind of forgiveness and man's first concern must be to resist injustice and call the offenders to account for their guilt." (p.54).

It is clear from the context that this resistance is prepared to go so far as to take the life of the offender. Bonhoeffer does not feel bound by an absolute law forbidding killing. He thinks and acts here within a relative freedom from law even while acknowledging its existence in the ultimate will of God for man.

There is an interesting reference in Bonhoeffer's discussion of "Suum cuique" in the chapter "The Last Things and the Things Before the Last" that suggest a casuistic ethic. "If one asks whether the individual is entitled to defend his natural rights, then the answer must clearly be yes." (p.112).

Although nothing is said here of defending one's rights to the point of killing an attacker, enough has already been said of Bonhoeffer's outlook on life and killing to indicate that this possibility is not excluded. The interesting point here is the assertion that the defence of one's rights is not unconditional or without limits. The defender must "in all circumstances defend the right in such a manner as to carry the conviction that it is not the individual but God who guarantees it." (p.112).

To attach limits to one's right to defend one's rights is to affirm that we are not totally free from the law against killing as we might be in an ethic of pure freedom or inspiration.

If we had here an ethic of pure law, killing would be prohibited absolutely. If we had an ethic of pure freedom it would be impossible to suggest antecedently that there are any limits, for according to this ethical view only the concrete situation can evoke God's will. What we have here rather, is the claim that we may on occasion break God's law against killing but only within certain limits. There is freedom from the law, but only relatively. A casuistic ethic underlies this passage.

One of the most important passages in the Ethics for our study of the inviolability or otherwise of life is a section called "The Right to Bodily Life" in the chapter "The Last Things and the Things Before the Last".

Here we discover that Bonhoeffer's view of the human body is soundly biblical. Man is an animated body. Personality without the body is inconceivable. The body is not only instrumental but has value as an end in itself.

This being the case, the body then has rights to continued life and Bonhoeffer makes this point in the following way:

> Bodily life, which we receive without any action on our own part, carries within itself the right to its preservation....Since it is God's will that there

> should be human life on earth only in the form of bodily life, it follows that it is for the sake of the whole man that the body possesses the right to be preserved....The underlying right of natural life is the safeguarding of nature against intentional injury, violation and killing. That may sound very jejune and unheroic. But the body does not exist primarily in order to be sacrificed, but in order that it may be preserved.
>
> (p.112)

From this we might draw the conclusion that — given the sanctity of the body and its right to continue in life — the taking of life is always an unqualified wrong, and is forbidden by God.

We we have seen Bonhoeffer does seem to hold in The Cost of Discipleship that there is an absolute law of God binding on the disciple that prohibits him from killing in any circumstances.

But we quickly see that in the Ethics, the prohibition of killing is not absolute. There are certain conditions under which the disciple must take life in order to preserve life. The prohibition of killing is qualified in the following way. Killing is absolutely forbidden when it is arbitrary. Arbitrary killing is defined as the deliberate destruction of innocent life. Bonhoeffer explains it like this:

> The first right of natural life consists in the safeguarding of the life of the body against arbitrary killing. One must speak of arbitrary killing wherever innocent life is deliberately destroyed. But in this context any life is innocent which does not engage in a conscious attack upon the life of another and which cannot be convicted of any criminal deed that is worthy of death.
>
> (p.115-6)

It follows, then, that where killing is not arbitrary, that is, where it is not the deliberate taking of innocent life, it may be permitted. Such a situation where killing is permitted, Bonhoeffer calls one of "unconditional necessity":

> The destruction of the life of another may be undertaken only on the basis of an unconditional necessity; when this necessity is present, then the killing must be performed, no matter how numerous or how good the reasons which weigh against it.
>
> (p.116)

Examples of such unconditional necessity permitting or even requiring killing are set out by Bonhoeffer:

> This means that the killing of the enemy in war is not arbitrary killing. For even if he is not personally guilty, he is nevertheless consciously participating in the attack of his people against the life of my people and he must share in bearing the consequences of the collective guilt. And, of course, there is nothing arbitrary about the killing of a criminal who has done injury to the life of another; nor yet about the killing of civilians in war, so long as it is not directly intended but is only an unfortunate consequence of a measure which is necessary on military grounds.
>
> (p.116)

Examples of arbitrary killing are then indicated:

> But it would be arbitrary to kill defenceless prisoners or wounded men who can no longer render themselves guilty of an attack on my life. It is arbitrary to kill an innocent man out of passion or for the sake of some advantage. All deliberate killing of innocent life is arbitrary.
>
> (p.116)

Individual cases must be examined to see if the condition inherent in them may be designated as "arbitrary" in which case

killing is forbidden, or "unconditionally necessary" in which case killing is required. We are involved then in an ethic that is free from a law of unqualified prohibition of killing.

What is not clear is what kind of moral guidance we do actually have. Does Bonhoeffer suggest that we are still operating within the realm of clear laws, but that now the laws are altered from a simple absolute forbidding of killing (Thou shalt not kill) to a more complex set of laws which say in effect: "Thou shall not deliberately kill the innocent". (The innocent...slay thou not", Ex.23:7), and "Thou shalt kill where there is unconditional necessity". In this case the ethical problem of the Christian would not be to ascertain the divine will, but simply to properly assess the situation to see which revealed law applies. What we would have here, in effect, is the commonly made distinction between killing and murder. Murder would correspond to what Bonhoeffer calls 'arbitrary' killing, that is, the deliberate destruction of innocent life. Murder would be absolutely proscribed, but other taking of life that could be described as 'necessary' killing — as, for example, in the protection of loved ones or self-defence — would be permitted. Or are we to conclude that Bonhoeffer is proposing a casuistic ethic in which the absolute law prohibiting killing of any kind remains the ideal standard required of God for human behavior, but is regrettably compromised by the fallen nature and history of man?

In the one case — that postulating an absolute law against murder — we should have to ponder the situation to see if killing could be described as according to the principle of murder and would, therefore, be prohibited; or as according to the principle of necessary killing and therefore, morally required. In the other case — that postulating a single law condemning all killing, but a law subject to adjustment to circumstances — we should have to ascertain whether conditions necessitate the assumption of guilt and the transgression of the law of God. As we shall see as this exposition of Bonhoeffer's ethics proceeds, he does not rationalize historically necessary acts into eternally valid divine decrees. His stress is always on the candid acknowledgement of the guiltiness of one's act even when the historical setting requires that the act be done. Necessary killing, therefore, is not obedience to a divine law decreed in creation "Thou shalt kill where there is unconditional necessity, but thou shalt not murder." It is, instead, a regretful recognition that our involvement 'in Adam' requires us at times to choose the breaking of God's law in response to his active guidance that seeks always to realize love for the neighbour in particular circumstances. But the limits imposed by the law of God continue to exercise their authority with such power, that never can 'arbitrary killing'

(murder) be construed as 'responsible action' seeking the realization of love. Restrictions are thus imposed by the divine law on freedom of action.

In either case we are left without a secure revelation of the divine will that guarantees our knowing in advance of a crisis precisely what God wants us to do. That there is indecision and uncertainty is seen in Bonhoeffer's treatment of the hypothetical case of an outbreak of plague aboard a ship:

> A borderline case involving all these considerations would arise, if, for example, on a ship, where there was no possibility of isolating the sick, there should be an outbreak of plague, and if, so far as human judgement could foretell, it was only through the death of the sick that the healthy could be saved. In this case the decision would have to remain open. (p.121)

Frequently a distinction is made between the taking of life in a private struggle and in the pursuit of the protection and well-being of others as in war.

Augustine argued that while it is wrong to kill in the pursuit of one's own self-interest — even in the defence of one's life — it is morally permitted to kill the evil doer who threatens to harm a third person. The rigorous non-resistance teaching of Jesus applies only to direct one-to-one personal encounters, and not to complex relationships where responsibility for the life of one's family and countryman is involved.[4]

It may be argued, on the other hand, that the taking of life is permissible in personal struggles where persuasion,

forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation are possible, but is forbidden in the impersonal and detached condition of war.

Now Bonhoeffer does not make use of this distinction between self-interest and neighbour-interest. He recognizes, as we saw above, that private existence is an abstraction. To live is to live with and for others. There are no actions that are strictly private and isolated from the community. One is always responsible for the neighbour.[5]

This is why war so frequently supplies examples of killing required by 'unconditional necessity'. For in war the element of responsibility for the well-being of others is in the forefront.

In the Ethics, therefore, war is the paradigm of justifiable killing. Other dubious cases acquire their warrant for killing by being measured over against war. To the extent that they possess characteristics analgous to those of war they are occasions permitting or requiring killing. For example, Bonhoeffer asks, "But must one not regard incurable hereditary disease as an attack against the safety of the community, just as much as for example an enemy attack in war? (p.120).

Although our concern is primarily with the ethical dilemma involved in taking the life of another person, Bonhoeffer's treatment of suicide is also relevant. Our question, it should be

recalled is about the existence of an absolute law prohibiting intentional (as opposed, of course, to accidental) killing. If there is such a law we would expect it to apply not only to the deliberate killing of another but to the killing of oneself. And so we ask if Bonhoeffer approves a rejection of suicide in all possible circumstances.

We note first of all that he distinguishes self-killing and self-murder. He says, "It is only if the action is undertaken exclusively and consciously out of consideration for one's own person that self-killing becomes self-murder." (p.126). Bonhoeffer then gives some examples to show that under certain conditions self-killing may indeed be self-sacrifice which is morally approved, rather than self-murder which is under the condemnation of God. The illustrations of self-killing that may be construed as self-sacrifice concern a prisoner, a statesman, and an incurably sick person. About them Bonhoeffer writes:

> If a prisoner takes his life for fear that under torture he might betray his country, his family, or his friend, or if the enemy threaten reprisals unless a certain statesman is surrendered to them and it is only by his own free death that this statesman can spare his country grievous harm, then the self-killing is so strongly subject to the motive of sacrifice that it will be impossible to condemn the deed. If a sufferer from incurable disease cannot fail to see that his care must bring about the material and psychological ruin of his family, and if therefore by his own decision frees them from this burden, then no doubt there are many objections to such an unauthorized action, and yet here, too, a condemnation will be impossible.
>
> (p.126)

In view of these instances where circumstances alter cases Bonhoeffer is obliged to conclude that there is no universally binding law against killing with respect to suicide. He says, "In view of such cases as these the prohibition of suicide can scarcely be made absolute to the exclusion of the freedom of sacrificing one's life." (p.126).

The law does exist but its claim to obedience is only relative within the contradictions and ironies of history. Only a casuistic handling of the law will render it effective as an instrument of mediating the knowledge of God's will in actual crises.

Further insight into Bonhoeffer's thought on life and killing is to be found in his treatment of abortion in the section "Reproduction and Nascent Life". Bonhoeffer states his view on induced abortion in this way.

> Destruction of the embryo in the mother's womb is a violation of the right to live which God has bestowed upon this nascent life. To raise the question whether we are here concerned already with a human being or not is merely to confuse the issue. The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create the human being and this nascent human being has been deliberately deprived of his life. And that is nothing but murder".
>
> (p.131)

We see that he makes no attempt whatsoever to rationalize the act of abortion into something less opprobrious than murder.

He recognizes the different degrees of culpability in the motives that lead to abortion, for example, despair, and extreme economic destitution. But the act remains murder. So far it is evident that the concept of law is being used here to shape the moral judgement. Regardless of motives and circumstances the deprivation of life of the embryo is murder. There is, indeed, a divine principle that forbids the taking of life, in this case, of the innocent embryo. What we should like to know now is whether this prohibition is unconditional or whether, given circumstances deemed appropriate, the embryo may be killed in the interests of a higher good. Bonhoeffer gives us no clear answer in this regard. He has been quite straight forward in affirming the necessity of taking adult life under conditions of 'historical necessity'. But whether he would sanction the killing of an embryo in any circumstance is notclear. There is a suggestion that the embryo's life is unqualifiedly inviolate. In a footnote Bonhoeffer refers to the frequently taken position that it is morally permissible to take the life of the embryo in order to spare that of the mother. With respect to this view he writes:

> If the child has its right to life from God, and is perhaps already capable of life, then the killing of the child, as an alternative to the presumed natural death of the mother, is surely a highly questionable action. The life of the mother is in the hand of God, but the life of a child is arbitrarily extinguished. The question whether the life of the mother or the life of the child is of greater value can hardly be a matter for a human decision.
>
> (p.131)

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Bonhoeffer feels that the prohibition of killing is absolute when it is applied to the life of an embryo. There is a law, in effect, that could be enunciated as follows, "Thou shalt never kill innocent nascent life".

Another passage that is relevant for our investigation of Bonhoeffer's attitudes on life and killing is found in the same section on "Reproduction and Nascent Life". He has been addressing himself to the problem whether the state has the right to enforce sterilization, a question to which he gives on the whole a negative answer, though his position is not entirely unequivocal. In this discussion Bonhoeffer makes a comparison between the state's rights over a man's body in war and in compulsory sterilization. He writes:

> So the question now arises whether the inviolability of his body is to be forfeited in order to render possible certain bodily functions which are subject to a powerful physical urge. No unequivocal answer can be given to this question. It may be that the physical impulse is so intense that, according to the conscientious self-judgement of the individual concerned, it would constitute a danger to his own life and to the lives of others, and in such cases, for the sake of preserving the patient's life as a whole, sterilization would be the lesser evil.
>
> (p.136)

Two things emerge here. The first is the assertion that the prohibition of killing is not absolute. "There are limits to the inviolability of the body." The second is that one of

the causes that justifies killing or the imposition of limits on the inviolability of the body is self-defence. We may conclude that this passage points to an ethic of casuistry as the underlying theory governing Christian conduct. There is a law, but it is compromisable, given situations that require, for example, self-defence.

In a passage that is crucial for grasping his ethical view, in the section "Vocation" under the heading "The Place of Responsibility", Bonhoeffer affirms the existence of the law of God that sets limits on the possibilites of our deeds. Yet he recognizes that responsible action — the action that God concretely wills in a specific situation — must be set free from the law on occasion. But this provisional suspension of the law is in order that the proper conditions may be achieved where the law may be re-asserted once again. He uses war as an example of this insight. He writes, "In war, for example, there is killing, lying and expropriation solely in order that the authority of life, truth and property may be restored." (p.229).

The assumptions underlying this illustration are clear. There is a law against killing: The Christian does not live by the pure inspiration of God's command. The objective and original will of God has been revealed in the Scripture's laws. The historical context in which the disciple must act, however, is corrupted

by sin, and compromise of the law is sometimes demanded by God. But the compromise is never rationalized away; it is seen for what it is, a transgression of the original divine intention for man. Bonhoeffer says in this respect, "A breach of the law must be recognized in all its gravity....Whether an action arises from responsibility or from cynicism is shown only by whether or not the objective guilt of the violation of the law is recognized and acknowledged, and by whether or not precisely in this violation, the law is hallowed." (p.229). This again is illustrative of what I have described as a casuistic ethic.

A final passage from the Ethics that draws attention to the historical necessity that imposes qualifications on the application of the revealed moral law is found in the chapter on the "State and Church". Here Bonhoeffer writes, "There is no glory in standing amid the ruins of one's native town in the consciousness that at least one has not oneself incurred any guilt. That is rather the self-glorification of the moral legalist in the face of history." (p.304). Strict adherence to the revealed law that forbids killing, for example, is not always the way to purity and acceptance by God. It may, instead, involve one in pharisaical self-righteousness that fails to love the neighbour and offends God. Authentic godly action must

leave room for freedom to obey God's living command that may break the law of his own ordaining.

4. Life and Killing in the Letters and Papers from Prison

We turn now to what is, chronologically speaking, the final body of evidence for our understanding of whether Bonhoeffer conceived our behaviour as Christians towards other human life ought to be governed by an absolute law, by the ad hoc command of God, or by a judgement that recognizes the claim of both the law of God and the concrete circumstances.

The Letters and Papers from Prison consists of letters written by Bonhoeffer to his parents and a friend from the time of his imprisonment by the Nazis on April 5, 1943. The last letter in the collection is dated January 17, 1945. In February of 1945 Bonhoeffer was moved to the concentration camp at Buchenwald and he was executed by the Nazis at the extermination camp at Flossenburg on April 9, 1945. The editor of Bonhoeffer's letters and papers (and of his incompleted Ethics), Eberhard Bethge, tells us, "unfortunately this move, [to the main Gestapo prison in Prinz Albrechtstrasse, Berlin] together with the arrest of the editor in October 1944, necessitated the destruction, for security reasons, of the letters written during the last months at Tegel." (p.10).

Also contained in this volume are some brief reflections composed by Bonhoeffer just before his arrest and during his imprisonment.

That Bonhoeffer continued to make a place in his ethical thought for justified killing — particularly killing under the

aegis of the state in war — is seen in a letter written from prison dated November 18, 1943, in which he says to his friend, "I wonder whether, supposing I am acquitted and released, and I had to join up, there is any chance of my getting into your regiment? That would be wonderful." (p.41-2).

Even though his participation in the army might have been only as a non-combatant chaplain, it is unlikely such an astute theologian as Bonhoeffer would have justified his involvement as a chaplain in a military body to which he was opposed in principle.

In a letter written on the second Sunday in Advent, Bonhoeffer says to his friend, "I hope you succeed in conveying something of its [Christmas] joy to your fellow-soldiers." (p.49). There is no note of condemnation of the soldier's calling here; no sense of a contradiction between the celebration of the festival of the Incarnation of the Prince of Peace and the vocation of the man whose role it is to take life in warfare.

We saw in The Cost of Discipleship that not only the overt act of killing is regarded as sin and thus prohibited by God, but also the inner attitudes of anger and insult, not simply because these lead to the overt acts of offence against the brother, but because they are in themselves acts of aggression against the brother.

Now, it is interesting to see that in Letters and Papers From Prison Bonhoeffer not only sanctions the act of killing

under morally appropriate circumstances, but also seems to condone the inner attitude of belligerence against an enemy. Bonhoeffer alludes to certain incidents in his prison life which manifest his resentment or repudiation of distasteful people, but he does not mention them with any sense of shame or self-reproach. For example, he writes in a letter to his friend, dated January 23, 1944:

> I have had to take a new line with the companion of my daily walks. Although he has done his best to ingratiate himself with me, he said something about the Jews the other day, which made me more off-handed and cool to him than I have ever been to anyone before, and I have also seen to it that he has been deprived of certain little comforts. Now he feels himself obliged to go round whimpering for a while, but I haven't a scrap of pity for him.
>
> (p.66)

It is questionable to what extent we should allow the unguarded revelations of personal letters to serve as indications of a thinker's systematic position on an issue. But if we take the episode above at face value we should have to conclude from this that Bonhoeffer is no longer moving in the atmosphere of The Cost of Discipleship with its idea that the disciple is unconditionally bound to fulfill Christ's absolute law forbidding killing and the hostile thought. Rigorism has given place to realism, that is, a grasp of the determining force of actual events.

In a brief reflection entitled "On Success" in the chapter "After Ten Years", Bonhoeffer speaks of our "respons-

ibility for history...a responsibility laid upon us by God...." (p.138). Bonhoeffer amplifies the meaning of this responsibility for history by an exhortation to face up to the future of the coming generation. Bonhoeffer condemns those who "in sheer resignation or pious escapism...surrender all responsibility for the preservation of life and for the generations yet unborn." (p.147).

Now, I think that implicit in any human responsibility for history and the future generations, is the assumption that one is guided by ends to be pursued and if possible achieved. These ends are, in the context of our present discussion, those achievements that make for the life and well-being of our heirs. Where one is directed only by an undeviating adherence to a law, there can be only an incidental concern with the historical future. First of all, the pursuit of the law's demands may in fact preclude a historical future or may do so at least for Christians. The inflexible adherence to the law's requirements — for example, non-resistance — may result, in the face of a sufficiently determined and ruthless enemy, in the extermination of the growing Christian generation.

Secondly, an uncompromising adherence to the law's performance presupposes an attitude of detachment to the historical future because the performance of the law is its own reward. Where obedience to the law is seen as the fundamental imperative

of God laid upon the disciple, then calculations about the historical future become largely irrelevant.

As we have noted, however, Bonhoeffer exhorts his readers to responsible action with an eye to securing life and opportunity for the future generation. He writes, "The ultimate question the man of responsibility asks is not, How can I extricate myself heroically from the affair? but, How is the coming generation to live?" (p.138-9).

We can only logically conclude that Bonhoeffer here thinks within the structure of an ethic of consequences rather than one of an absolute way. That is, Bonhoeffer is concerned with a decision governed — in part, at least — by purposes attainable in the concrete circumstances and not by an absolute law directly applicable in every circumstance.

Let us turn our attention now to what inferences we may draw from this point of view.

First, since the law is not universal and binding, we must conclude that there is no absolute prohibition against killing. Neither is there any approval of an indiscriminate taking of life. Rather, the concrete circumstances will determine whether the taking of life will make for life and opportunity for future generations and the disciple must prayerfully try to assess the real nature of those circumstances. The vast difficulty in detecting truly the real nature of events prompted Bonhoeffer to say, "In

short it is easier by far to act on abstract principle than from concrete responsibility." (p.139).

Clearly, then, Bonhoeffer is not enjoining an ethical system in which laws are regarded as absolute, that is, universally valid for all men at all times in all circumstances, and binding without compromise or adaptation. Rather, he avers that the only ethical system that adequately conveys the concreteness of Christian love, is one in which the requirements of the law can be integrated with the neighbour's real needs of the moment.

5. Conclusions

To what conclusions does this various evidence on the subject of life and killing lead us? Does Bonhoeffer in this sphere evince a theory of law, freedom or casuistry? Is there an absolute prohibition of killing?

We have seen that every passage in The Cost of Discipleship that serves as evidence on the question points to an ethic of absolute law. There is a law of God forbidding the Christian to kill under any circumstances. Moreover, the law is binding: the true disciple is expected to be utterly obedient to this law. He is empowered by the appropriation of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ to fulfill the commands of God.[6]

By the time of the composition of the Ethics and the Letters and Papers from Prison, however, Bonhoeffer's ethical viewpoint has altered. His repeated stress on the revealed law in the Scriptures and on the Christian's necessary 'fellowship of human guilt' and 'acceptance of guilt', indicates that there does remain even for the Christian an objective, declared law. Now, however, this law is not absolute, that is, it is not universal and binding but is adaptable to the needs of love in the concrete context in response to the intentions of the living God.

This shift in thought is undoubtedly explained by Bonhoeffer's long opposition to Nazi idolatry and tyranny. As the

memoir in The Cost of Discipleship tells us, already in "February, 1933, he denounced on the wireless a political system which corrupted and grossly misled a nation and made the 'Fuehrer' its idol and God." (p.11). Bonhoeffer's political opposition to the Hitler regime involved him eventually in the resistance movement which sought to overthrow the Nazi government. This opposition to Hitler culminated in the officers' plot to assassinate him on July 20, 1944, which failed. Bonhoeffer had already been imprisoned at the time of this abortive assassination but his part in the opposition resulted in his execution at Flossenburg on what are presumed to be the express orders of Hitler.

Added to the travails of the political opposition to Hitler was the anguish of Bonhoeffer's role in the bitter German Church struggle between the German Christians who accomodated the Christian faith to the Nazi ideology, especially the doctrine of volk; and the Confessing Church which sought to remain faithful to the sole leadership of Christ.

Anyone who wishes to understand Bonhoeffer's participation in this political and ecclesiastical struggle should read his correspondence, especially that with G.K.A.Bell, then Bishop of Chichester in the Gesammelte Schriften.

In the face of this demonic evil that had entrenched itself in the state and in the Church, Bonhoeffer felt the inadequacy

of a theory that urged unqualified adherence to moral laws and failed to grapple with the wider implications of the obligation to love and was not sensitive to the designs of God in historical situations of extreme confusion and wickedness. The consequence was Bonhoeffer's revision of his ethical theory from absolute law to casuistry or, as he called it, responsible action. In this view the immediate claim of God and the neighbour in the concrete situation determine the right act. There could not, therefore, be an absolute prohibition of killing. Bonhoeffer put his seal of approval on the ethic of responsible action which is prepared to take life under historical necessity, by his own active participation in the resistance against Hitler that involved killing as one of its pre-suppositions.[7]

We should note one inconsistency here. Bonhoeffer seemed unwilling to lift the absolute prohibition of killing from nascent life. It appears that under no circumstances would he be prepared to entertain the deliberate killing of an embryo. In this respect, his course of action was always assured for the future. As such, the decision on abortion remains an exception to his general theory of responsible action in which openness to the living command of God is essential.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1] cf., T. W. Manson, Ethics and the Gospel (London: SCM, 1960), pp.63-4.

> Hatred and lustful desire are not just unhealthy phychological conditions in the person who has them: they are wrongs done to the person towards whom these thoughts are directed. What Jesus is saying is that if you are to love your neighbour with the kind of love that God requires you must not only treat him rightly and speak to him rightly; you must think about him rightly. To love as Christ loves means to put so high a valuation on your neighbour that it will be as impossible for you to harbour evil thoughts about him as to do him a physical injury.
> It may be asked what harm hate in the heart or lust in the eye do to anyone but the person who harbours them. But it does not require much sensitiveness to the nuances of human behaviour to know that hate can be felt outside the hater without a word spoken or a hand raised; and there can be a horrible awareness of the predatory eye.

[2] cf., Paul Schneider: Pastor of Buchenwald (London: SCM, 1956), pp.68-9, by E. H. Robertson.

Pastor Schneider's wife writes:

> Then, I could ask him the question I had longed to ask, ever since the night he made his decision alone. 'Was it necessary for you to forget your love for us on that night of decision?" His reply lives with me: 'I have never loved you more than on that night of decision. I wept for you.'...When I spoke to him about our children, he always said that it was just because of them that we must be sure to be true to God.

[3] cf., Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p.322

> From this there follows the denial of the idea of a double church morality, i.e. one morality for the world and another morality for the congregation, one for the heathen and another for the Christians, one for the Christian in the secular sphere and another for the homo religiosus. The whole law and the whole gospel of God belong equally to all men.

This can simply mean the rejection of all dualisms — spatial, vocational and religious — within the life of the Christian. The standards of grace, the Kingdom ethic of love, apply to all activities, towards all persons, in all spheres. But it is still assumed that only the Christian can live this way; the unconverted man cannot. This is the usual point of view. George Caird in The Truth of the Gospel (London: Oxford, 1950) says, "One point, however, is sufficiently clear, that the Christian cannot impose his Christian standards on those who do not share his Christian convictions." (p.138). T. W. Manson in Ethics and the Gospel says, "The Sermon is addressed to disciples, not to mankind in general." (p.50).

But Bonhoeffer goes on to say an astounding thing, "There are not two scales of values, one for the world and one for the Christians, but there is the one and only word of God, which demands faith and obedience, and which is addressed to all mankind." (p.323).

This amounts to a rejection of a distinction between the conduct of the person who lives by faith in the grace of Christ

and the person who is faith-less. The chapter, composed in Tegal prison, in which this assertion is found was one of the last things Bonhoeffer wrote. How unfortunate that he was not permitted to develop this thought.

[4] For a discussion of this see Paul Ramsay, Basic Christian Ethics (New York: Scribners, 1953), pp.171-184.

[5] cf., Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p.48

> It is the entirely personal sin of the individual which is recognized here as a source of pollution for the community. Even the most secret sin of the individual is defilement and destruction of the body of Christ (I Cor. 6:15).

[6] The call to absolute obedience to the will of God understood as absolute laws revealed in the Bible that is characteristic of The Cost of Discipleship is reflected in the report "The Church and the World of Nations: The Fundamental Principles of the World Alliance" which was authored by Bonhoeffer. In one section he writes:

> The Christian Church answers: The human will must be confronted with the commandment: Thou shalt not kill. God does not exempt us from obeying His commandments. Man by his transgressions will be guilty before God. The God of the Sermon on the Mount will judge him. To the objection: The State must be maintained: the Church answers: Thou shalt not kill. To the objection: War creates peace: the Church answers: This is not true, war creates destruction. To the objection: The nation (Volk) must defend itself: the Church answers: Have you dared to entrust God, in full faith, with your protection in obedience to His commandment? To the objection: Love for my neighbour compels me: The Church answers: The one

> who loves God keeps His commandments. To the question: What shall I do then? the Church answers: Believe in God and be obedient. But to the secular pacifism the Church answers: The motives of our actions are not the welfare of humanity, but obedience to God's commandments. Even if war meant the good of humanity, God's commandment would remain steadfast.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gesammelte Schriften, Band 1, (Munchen; Kaiser Verlag, 1958), pp.445-6.

[7] In a letter to Bishop Bell of March 25, 1939, Bonhoeffer writes:

> "It seems to me conscientiously impossible to join in a war under the present circumstances. On the other hand, the Confessional Church as such has not taken any definite attitude in this respect and probably cannot take it as things are. So I should cause a tremendous damage to my brethren if I would make a stand on this point which would be regarded by the regime as typical of the hostility of our Church towards the state....In spite of much reading and thinking concerning this matter I have not yet made up my mind what I would do under different circumstances. But actually as things are I should have to do violence to my Christian conviction, if I would take up arms "here and now".
>
> (Gesammelte Schriften, Band 1, p.279f.)

We see that Bonhoeffer has already here abandoned the ethical absolutism that permeates The Cost of Discipleship. He entertains the possibility that under circumstances different than the present Nazi conscription he might join an army and wage war. Nor is this letter a contradiction of the point of view of the Ethics. Bonhoeffer is not disclaiming here any prospect of taking life but only the moral impossibility of killing as a member of the German army on behalf of the idolatrous Nazi state.

III. SEX — IS THERE AN ABSOLUTE LAW PROHIBITING ADULTERY?

1. Preliminary: Posing the Question

We address our attention now to sexual experience as a test case that usually serves to illumine whether or not Christian ethics is governed by absolute law, or is free from law, or is the result of a casuistic treatment of law.

When we speak of an ethic of law we are affirming that Christ's command to love, directed to the realm of the relations between the sexes, is always specified by the prohibition of adultery. There is an absolute divine law: "Thou shalt not commit adultery". The law is universally binding and is uncompromisable. No person, under any circumstances, is permitted by God to commit adultery. He may fall into sin, but he is not entitled to choose sin. He is not permitted to claim that God would in any circumstances command adultery. God's existential command is always an expression of his absolute law that, in this case, prohibits adultery.

When we speak of an ethic of total freedom from law or an ethic of inspiration, we are affirming that there does not exist a law prohibiting adultery. Apart from God's concrete command in an actual situation, we are not able to say whether or not God wills chastity or adultery. When we speak of freedom from law with respect to sexual relations, we are, in effect, asking: "Does

God, in any circumstances, command that I commit adultery?"

Lest this seem a scandalous way to pose the question, we must remember that we frequently ask the same question about killing — "Does God, in any circumstances, will that I kill?" — and answer in the affirmative.

The question of monogamy should not be confused with the question of adultery. It is possible to maintain that marriage of one man and one woman is a divine ordinance without stipulating that such a permanent commitment always implies sexual exclusiveness. It is possible to construct hypothetical cases where precisely love for the marriage partner could serve as a motive for sexual relations with another, that is, adultery.

When we speak of an ethic of casuistry, we are affirming an ethical position that lies between the ethic of law and the ethic of inspiration. This view requires the existence of an ideal law of God for our behaviour, but feels obliged to conclude that sinful human nature that has corrupted history militates against the constant direct implementation of the divine law. It is not simply that we may be morally unable to fulfill the law; it is sometimes undesirable that we should. More wrong and hurt would result from our rigorous implementation of the law, than from our accomodation of the law to the concrete sinful circumstances.

With respect to the test case under discussion now, the

casuistic ethic would say that while God's ideal law — his will intended in creation — is an absolute prohibition of adultery; nevertheless, the sinful state of society may morally require the act of adultery on occasion.

Against the background of this introduction, let us turn now to Bonhoeffer's writings and investigating those passages where he deals with sex, let us see how he answers the question: "Is there an absolute law prohibiting adultery?"

2. Sex and Adultery in The Cost of Discipleship

In The Cost of Discipleship Bonhoeffer's teaching on sex is epitomized by his statement "Adherence to Jesus allows no free rein to desire unless it be accompanied by love." This by itself, however, does not enable us to answer the question, "Is there an absolute law against adultery?"

For love is fundamentally a spiritual relationship; adultery on the other hand is essentially an institutional relationship, or, more accurately, the violation of an institutional relationship. Although genuine love must be externalized in concrete acts and institutions, its essence remains an interior attitude of fellowship, affection and commitment. Adultery, by definition, is the overt act in which sexual fidelity to the other party in marriage is contravened by sexual intercourse with another. It does not follow logically that love and adultery are exclusive.

It is conceivable that a person might subscribe to Bonhoeffer's judgment that the expression of desire must be accompanied by love, while at the same time engaging in that intercourse outside of the institution of marriage that is adultery. On Bonhoeffer's premise, it may be argued that while intercourse unaccompanied by love is sin, intercourse outside the institution of marriage need not necessarily be sin. Operating only with love as the criterion for permissable sexual relations, we might deduce

that there is no absolute law regarding adultery. The condition for legitimate, that is, divinely sanctioned, sexual relations is the existence of the interior attitude of love.

Let us move on to another criterion Bonhoeffer gives for the legitimacy of the expression of desire. The expression of desire — in this case, sexual relations — are sinful if they destroy our relationship with Christ.

> No sacrifice is too great if it enables us to conquer a lust which cuts us off from Jesus. Both eye and hand are less than Christ, and when they are used as the instruments of lust and hinder the whole body from the purity of discipleship, they must be sacrificed for the sake of him.
>
> (p.119)

But this norm of fellowship with Jesus is no more specific than the norm of love examined above. For it can be argued that in the act of adultery, that is, the violation of the institution of marriage in favour of the expression of physical desire with someone who is loved, the adulterer may find himself close to the divine love and compassion of Jesus.

On the basis of these passages we might conclude that Bonhoeffer does not give us an ethic of law with regard to sexual behaviour but rather an ethic that is free from law. There is no general law that says to the disciple, "Thou shalt never commit adultery," but only the condition that desire be expressed only where love and fellowship with Jesus are present.

Although it may be dissented that under no circumstances

could adultery be compatible with love and fellowship with Jesus, this is by no means self-evident once the general prohibition against adultery has been abandoned in favour of the interior attitudes of love and fellowship with Christ as the criteria for Christian sexual relationships.

The preceeding interpretations of Bonhoeffer's statements about love and fellowship with Christ suggest to our minds an ethic of freedom from law or inspiration. But what follows in the chapter "Woman" evinces astrictness about marriage and adultery that will not tolerate these interpretations.

The following passage gives evidence of being composed within a frame of mind that will not entertain the possibility that adultery can ever be legitimate, that is, morally necessary.

> Jesus does not enjoin his disciples to marry, but he does sanctify marriage according to the law by affirming its indissolubility and by prohibiting the innocent party from remarrying when the guilty partner has broken the marriage by adultery. This prohibition liberates marriage from selfish, evil desire, and consecrates it to the service of love, which is possible only in a life of discipleship.
>
> (p.120)

Expression is here given to the principle that marriage is permanent; it may not be morally terminated by human will. Then we are told that when marriage is broken by the sinful will through adultery, the innocent party is still forbidden to remarry. This prohibition of remarriage is intended to do two

things: First, to cleanse marriage from "selfish, evil desire" and second, "consecrate it for the service of love". The first of these functions may be taken as showing that for Bonhoeffer the expression of sexual desire outside marriage (and for Bonhoeffer there can be only one marriage) is not only sin but unconditionally condemned. The second suggests further that love and marriage are congruent. It is not conceived that love of man and woman should exist except in a preparatory way, outside of marriage. We have seen previously that sexual intercourse must always be an expression of love. If these two inferences are correct then it follows that sexual intercourse outside marriage is wrong in all cases. There is an absolute divine prohibition of adultery.

We should examine two other brief passages which shed light on Bonhoeffer's appraisal of sex and adultery. He says that, "Christian marriage is marked by discipline and self-denial." (p.120). Although it is not an incontrovertible deduction, we may gather from this that the discipline and self-denial referred to excludes sexual relations beyond marriage.

At the end of this same chapter Bonhoeffer says, "As they [those who belong to Christ] contemplate this body which was given for them and as they share its life, the disciples receive strength for the chastity which Jesus requires." (p.121). There is no hint

given that we should re-interpret 'chastity' to signify something other than its surface, common sense meaning of purity from unlawful sexual intercourse. To say without qualification that Jesus requires chastity of his disciples is to affirm that Jesus prohibits absolutely the committing of adultery.

Finally there is a passage in the exposition of Matthew 6:16-18 in the chapter "The Hiddenness of the Devout Life". Here Bonhoeffer says "When all is said and done, the life of Faith is nothing if not an unending struggle of the spirit with every available weapon against the flesh." (p.152). It will certainly strike most people that the atmosphere generated by these words is such that we are moved to conclude that Bonhoeffer does not foresee any instance where the divine prohibition of adultery in the seventh commandment of the Decalogue must be broken by the necessary, existential command of God.

3. Sex and Adultery in the Ethics

In a section entitled "Inheritance and Decay" in his Ethics, Bonhoeffer alludes to sex in a way that suggests that sexual experience ought to be governed by a strict law even in the face of urgent pressures that make the strictures of law seem difficult and burdensome.

Bonhoeffer had been writing about the decay in Western culture that has deprived people of a sense of disciplined responsibility towards their historical inheritance — a responsibility to nourish it in the present and transmit it on to the future. In this vein, he says, "Serious tensions and inwardly necessary periods of waiting are not sustained. This is apparent in the field of labour and in the erotic field alike." (p.43).

Although it is not explicit, we may interpret the "necessary periods of waiting" as those imposed when an absolute law restricting sexual expression to marriage conflicts with circumstances in which either marriage is impossible or the married partners separated. This interpretation leads us to conclude that Bonhoeffer has in mind here an absolute law governing sexual relations, that is, a law prohibiting adultery in all circumstances.

Though this position may very likely have been in Bonhoeffer's mind it does not appear consistent with what follows in the same passage. He goes on to speak of the decadence in which, "There is no longer any understanding for the slow, labor-

ious conflict between knowledge of the right and the necessities of the hour, the conflict which was the genuine political life of the west, with all its voluntary concessions and its authentically free responsibility." (p.43).

This general statement attributes virtue to an ethical realism that recognizes that historical necessity imposes qualifications on the exercise of moral laws. We have here support for a casuistic ethic that does not concur with the absolutist perspective in Bonhoeffer's reference to the erotic field.

In the section entitled "Guilt, Justification and Renewal" under the subtitle "The Confession of Guilt", Bonhoeffer again refers to sex in a way that implies an absolute law governing sexual experience. He writes:

> The Church confesses that she has found no word of advice and assistance in the face of the dissolution of all order in the relation between the sexes. She has found no strong and effective answer to the contempt for chastity and to the proclamation of sexual libertinism. All she has achieved has been an occasional expression of moral indignation. She has thus rendered herself guilty of the loss of the purity and soundness of youth. She has failed to proclaim with sufficient emphasis that our bodies belong to the Body of Christ.
>
> (p.50)

There is a brief passage in a section entitled "The Right to Bodily Life" in the chapter "The Last Things and the Things Before the Last" that indicates that Bonhoeffer's thought about sexual expression moves always within the limits

of marriage. He writes, "Sex is not only the means of reproduction, but, independently of this defined purpose, it brings with it its own joy, in married life, in the love of two human beings for one another." (p.114).

The fact that Bonhoeffer found it necessary when discussing the bodily joy of sex to indicate that this joy ought to be attained only in marriage, points to an underlying allegiance to a divine law prohibiting adultery. This is evidence for an ethic of law.

Another passage that provides us with evidence for Bonhoeffer's views on God's will for sexual life is contained in a section entitled "The Natural" under the subtitle "Reproduction and Nascent Life".

This is largely a discussion on the morality of birth-control. Bonhoeffer recognizes the double purpose of marriage: the first purpose is the achievement of what he calls 'partnership of the sexes' which includes bodily union; the second purpose is procreation. In the discussion, Bonhoeffer comes out for 'the right to full bodily union' independently of the 'right of reproduction'. But he makes it clear that this intrinsically valuable right to bodily union is a right belonging only to the institution of marriage. Bonhoeffer writes:

> In approaching this question it is indispensable, for the sake of marriage as a whole, that one should acknowledge a right to full bodily union as a right which is quite distinct from the right of reproduction, even though essentially it can never be entirely separated from it, the two being closely allied; it is a right that is founded upon the mutual love of the married pair. (p.134)

The right of sexual expression rests upon mutual love of persons who are joined in marriage.

This passage suggests that Bonhoeffer acknowledges the existence of a divine law prohibiting adultery absolutely. Sexual intercourse is restricted not simply to those who stand in a relationship of love to each other, but to those whose love has been 'fulfilled and perfected' in the institution of marriage.

In another passage, sub-titled "The Freedom of Bodily Life", Bonhoeffer raises the question of rape. Rape is characterized by exploitation of another's body for self-gratification coupled with coercion.

Bonhoeffer defines rape in this way:

> Rape is the use of the body of another for one's own purposes, enforced by the application of a power which is not rightful. In opposition to it there stands the right of the human being to give or to refuse his body in freedom.
>
> (p.137)

He goes on to say:

> Any attempt to bring about particular marriages or other sexual relationships by coercion, whatever the reasons may be, is quite clearly an infringement of the bodily liberty of the human being, and it conflicts with that underlying fact of sexual life which, as a natural mode of defence, marks the limit beyond which no alien interference may pass, namely the sense of shame. In the natural feeling of shame expression is given to the essential freedom of the human body in its sexual aspect.
>
> (p.138)

It is true there is nothing here that provides positive evidence in favour of a law of God forbidding adultery unconditionally, but it should be conceded that the tone of the passage suggests this. More startling, however, is Bonhoeffer's placing of sex in a unique position of inviolability. Whereas the divine command respecting coercion is generally compromisable, it becomes totally uncompromisable when it is directed towards sexual life.

Bonhoeffer writes:

> In special circumstances the bodily strength of the individual may rightfully be set to work for the sake of the common good even under compulsion, but human sexuality remains exempt from any such constraint.
>
> (p.137-8)

Although this is by no means decisive proof, this exemption of sexual experience again suggests the existence of a divine law that absolutely restricts sexual intercourse to marriage.

The last and most interesting passage in the Ethics dealing with sex occurs in the chapter entitled "The 'Ethical' and the 'Christian' as a Theme" in the sub-section "The Commandment of God". Bonhoeffer's thesis in this section is that the commandment of God sets us 'free from the anxiety and the uncertainty of decision'. "The Commandment of God is the permission to live as man before God". (p.248).

In this context, Bonhoeffer writes of marriage:

> If I love my wife, if I accept marriage as an institution of God, then there comes an inner freedom and certainty of life and action in marriage; I no longer watch with suspicion every step that I take; I no longer call in question every deed that I perform. The divine prohibition of adultery is then no longer the centre around which all my thought and action in marriage revolves. (As though the meaning and purpose of marriage consisted of nothing except the avoidance of adultery!) But it is the honouring and the free acceptance of marriage, the leaving behind of the prohibition of adultery, which is now the precondition for the fulfilment of the divine commission of marriage. The divine commandment has here become the permission to live in marriage in freedom and certainty.
>
> (p.248)

What sense are we to make of this passge? To begin with, Bonhoeffer assumes that there is in fact a divine prohibition of adultery. This assumption rules out an ethic of total freedom from law in which there exist no general principles or rules but only the inspiration of God revealing his will for that single occasion. There is a divine law prohibiting adultery. But then Bonhoeffer goes on to speak of this law as being "no longer the centre around which all my thought and action in marriage revolves" and "the leaving behind of the prohibition of adultery." The first statement about "the centre" we may understand readily enough as the futility of grounding marriage in a negative prescription. In a marriage that grows in depth the prohibition against adultery with its attendant suspicion moves from the foreground of attention to a remote place in the background. Love is more than avoidance of adultery. But the second statement —

"the leaving behind of the prohibition of adultery" — is more perplexing. Are we to understand this as a "teleological suspension" of the divine prohibition of adultery? This would leave us with a form of casuistic ethic lying midway between absolute law and absolute freedom from law. There does exist a divine law — "Thou shalt not commit adultery" — but certain conditions may make it more desirable that the law be abandoned provisionally in favour of a different expression of the sexual drive. By more desirable, I mean, conformable to the command of God addressed to that specific situation.

This is certainly a possible interpretation of the passage in question, but seen against the background of Bonhoeffer's other declarations on sex, seems highly improbable.

It can scarcely be disputed that on the basis of his actual pronouncement on sexual life Bonhoeffer believes in the existence of an absolute law of God prohibiting adultery; that is, a prohibition that is binding on all men in whatever circumstances they may find themselves.

4. Sex and Adultery in the Letters and Papers from Prison

Our question, let us remember, is: Has God forbidden us absolutely to commit adultery, that is, to have sexual intercourse with someone who is not our mate in marriage? Is the commandment in the Decalogue "Thou shalt not commit adultery" an absolute, uncompromisable law?

If we were to discover a divine sanction for adultery, we should presumably set about looking for cases where sexual intercourse with the not-mate could be construed as justified by special circumstances.[1]

An instance that might present itself for our consideration would be the enforced, lengthy separation of the two parties in a marriage. Bonhoeffer sympathetically grasped the agony of such a situation. He writes, "When a man has entered upon a supremely happy marriage for which he thanks God, it is an awful blow to discover that the same God now demands a period of such great privation. In my experience nothing tortures us so much as longing." (p.55).

But Bonhoeffer does not entertain the idea that these unnatural and burdensome circumstances permit a digression from the pattern of marital fidelity.

> When we are forcibly separated from those we love, we simply cannot, like so many others, contrive for ourselves some cheap substitute elsewhere. — I don't mean because of moral considerations, but because we are what we are. We find the very idea of substitutes repulsive. All we can do is to wait patiently; we

> must suffer the unutterable agony of separation, and feel the longing until it makes us sick. For that is the only way in which we can preserve our relationship with our loved ones unimpaired.
>
> (p.55)

Evidence of Bonhoeffer's attitude towards the sexual relationship is found in his commentary on modern novels and films in connection with his notion of "the revolt of inferiority" against the claims and achievements of excellence.

> It is the same kind of thing you find in the novels of the last fifty years, which think they have only depicted their characters properly when they have described them in bed, or in films where it is thought necessary to include undressing scenes. What is clothed, veiled, pure and chaste is considered to be deceitful, disguised and impure, and in fact only shows the impurity of the writers themselves. Mistrust and suspicion as the basic attitude of men is characteristic of the revolt of inferiority.
>
> (p.117)

Another problem is hinted at in a letter written on May 30, 1944 — What are the alternatives for a person who is consumed with sexual desire and who is not married? Shall he feel bound by an absolute law that prohibits intercourse with one not his in marriage? He may feel so bound at the price of an enormous self-preoccupation with an unexpressed desire that distracts him from the accomplishment of important tasks.

Or shall he decide that there is no such law, that only the inspired command of God addressed to each unique situation can establish right and wrong? If this is his ethical theory, he may decide that, in the interest of the achievement of valuable goals, God wants him delivered from the distractions of

un-relieved sexual desire.

Or shall he decide that the law is the original intention of God for mankind, but that in his un-ideal situation, the law cannot be regarded as absolute; that it is compromisable; and that in his present context, it is preferable to attain expression rather than sacrifice the serenity and concentration required for other tasks.

Bonhoeffer gives no clear answer to this dilemma. He writes:

> I expect you will say it's wrong to suppress one's desires, and you will be quite right...So I seek diversion in thinking and writing letters...and curb my desires as a measure of self-protection. I know it sounds paradoxical, but it would be more selfless if I had no fear of my desires, but could give them free rein—but that would be very difficult. (p.104)

Unfortunately, Bonhoeffer does not consider cases of adultery undertaken for the sake of love for others, including the person to whom one is married. What would have been Bonhoeffer's judgement on adultery committed to rescue a loved one from torture and death at the hands of a totalitarian regime? Basing ourselves on the majority of his statements about sex we are compelled to conclude that he would condemn such an act since it would be a violation of the absolute law of God forbidding adultery. But on the basis of his general concept of 'responsible action' which we shall examine shortly, we would be justified in concluding that such instances of adultery would be morally approved.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the passages dealing with sex and adultery are we to conclude that Bonhoeffer embraces an ethic of law, freedom or casuistry?

We have noted that this problem may be resolved by asking the question: Does Bonhoeffer believe that there is an absolute law prohibiting adultery, that is, sexual intercourse with someone to whom one is not married?

The evidence adduced points, on the whole, to an answer in the affirmative. There is a law against adultery and it is absolute, for under no circumstances is a disciple commanded by God to commit adultery with a view to securing a greater good or a fuller expression of love than would be possible by strict adherence to the law. No historical necessity can possibly require the adaptation or compromise of the law forbidding adultery. This absolutist position regarding sex has to be viewed as an exception to the general ethical view of 'responsible action' which would lead us to believe that under certain conditions the law against adultery is compromisable for the sake of love and in response to the command of God. We have noted, however, a few passages that can bear a casuistic interpretation, and the possibility should be left open that had Bonhoeffer felt compelled to think through the ethics of sex as thoroughly as the ethics of killing, his pronouncements on sex and adultery would have been brought more in line with his theory of responsible action.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1] cf. the following:

The questions present themselves: 'Is it really not permitted to me, yes — expected of me, now, here, in my particular situation, to appease desire?' The tempter puts me in a privileged position as he tried to put the hungry Son of God in a privileged position."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Temptation, p.33.

IV. TRUTH — IS THERE AN ABSOLUTE LAW PROHIBITING LYING?

1. Preliminary: Posing the Question

Is there an absolute law concerning truth-telling? By this question I mean: Is the Christian required by God to tell the truth to all persons in all circumstances?

An answer requires first of all that we give some precision to the notion 'telling the truth'. In The Cost of Discipleship where he dealt with this problem in his exposition of Matthew 5:33-37 (Jesus' prohibition of oaths) Bonhoeffer did not find it necessary to define what is meant by telling the truth. No doubt he felt that there is a common sense definition that can be assumed to be held by all. In his Ethics and in the Letters and Papers from Prison, however, after having wrestled theologically with this problem in the face of his involvement in the resistance against Hitler and his imprisonment, he articulated this common sense notion as follows: Truth is the correspondence between thought and speech. And conversely, the lie is a conscious discrepancy between thought and speech. This, I believe, is what people usually mean when they speak of telling the truth or lying.

We shall have occasion to see in the treatment of this matter in the Ethics that Bonhoeffer concluded that this common-

sense notion does not exhaust the meaning of telling the truth, nor does it, indeed, even strike at the heart of the matter. Nevertheless, it is true that in normal usage telling the truth designates speech that corresponds with the speaker's thoughts.

Now our question becomes: Does God require that in all circumstances our speech should be an accurate reflection of what we are thinking.

2. Truth and Lying in The Cost of Discipleship

Bonhoeffer understands Christ's prohibition of oaths in Matthew 5: 33-37 to be determined by his unqualified opposition to the lie. The oath is rejected because it serves to give a certain legitimacy to the lie. If we hold that only that speech which is reinforced by an oath is certain to be true, then we hold by implication, that speech unaccompanied by an oath has a right to be dishonest. As Bonhoeffer says, "Where alone the oath claims final truth, is space in life given to the lie, and it is granted a certain right of life." (p.123).

But is it always wrong to give space to a lie? The answer is seen in the repudiation of the oath. Oaths are to be dispensed with. "Therefore the oath must go, since it is a protection for the lie." (p.123). The oath must go because under no circumstance is it permissible for the disciple of Christ to dissemble; he does not need the oath to establish the veracity of his speech because he is under an absolute law that forbids lying. Bonhoeffer writes:

> Hence they (the disciples) are forbidden to swear at all. Since they always speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth, there is no need for an oath, which would only throw doubt on the veracity of all their other statements. That is why the oath is 'of the evil one'. But a disciple must be a light even in his words. (p.123)

In summary, the logic is as follows:

1) Oaths distinguish true speech from false.

2) But the disciple is under absolute obligation to always

tell the truth.

3) Therefore, there will be no distinction in the disciples speech between true and false utterances.

4) Therefore, oaths are unnecessary and are forbidden by Jesus.

The important point for our purpose is that the prohibition of oaths is defensible only on the assumption that there exists for the disciple an unqualified law forbidding lying.

3. Truth and Lying in The Ethics

Our first piece of evidence is found in the chapter entitled "The Last Things and the Things Before the Last" in the section "The Preparing of the Way". Here Bonhoeffer writes:

> 'The crooked shall be made straight' (Luke 3:5). The way of Christ is a straight way. There is a measure of entanglement in the lie,...which makes the coming of grace particularly difficult. That is why the way had to be made straight on which Christ is to come to man.
>
> (p.93)

The lie is treated here as something bad without qualification. Its gravity is seen in the fact that the lie is an obstacle to the coming of Christ with all his grace. Though it is not explicitly stated that there is a law from God forbidding lying on all occasions, it would be a reasonable surmise that anything that impedes the advent of the Saviour is unconditionally wrong and prohibited.

The next passage that is pertinent to our enquiry about lying is found in the section entitled "Shame" in the chapter "The Love of God and the Decay of the World". Basing himself on the exposition of the text "They made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3:7) Bonhoeffer holds that man, who has fallen away from his godly origin and as a consequence experiences his life as 'disunited', feels shamed by his disunited condition. The

device by means of which disunited and shamed of man seeks to overcome his condition is concealment. It is his shame that prompts concealment, the hiding of the disunion that results from his "falling away from the origin". In his shame man finds that complete openness with another where nothing is hidden from the knowledge of the person who stands over against him is neither possible nor desirable. Now in his fallen state "man lives between covering and discovering, between self-concealment and self-revelation, between solitude and fellowship". (p.146).

On the basis of this passage it seems logical to suppose that there is not, in man's fallen state, an absolute law of God forbidding him to lie in all circumstances. Concealment is on occasion a necessity imposed by the realities of sinful existence. This notion of concealment had been anticipated in Life Together where Bonhoeffer wrote, "It must be a decisive rule of every Christian fellowship that each individual is prohibited from saying much that occurs to him." (p.82).

In an illuminating section called "Conscience" in the chapter "History and Good" Bonhoeffer distinguishes 'responsible action' from 'self-righteously high-principled action'. The conscience that has been set free "for the service of God and of our neighbour" is prepared to "enter into the fellowship of human

guilt". It recognizes that there is an obedience to God that paradoxically breaks God's moral law for the sake of God and the neighbour. This 'responsible action' involves us in only a 'relative freedom from sin' as opposed to the 'high principled actions' which seeks total freedom from sin but falls into self righteousness and denies the concrete claim of the neighbour.

Bonhoeffer accuses Kant of maintaining an ethic of self-righteous high-principle. He says:

> From the principle of truthfulness Kant draws the grotesque conclusion that I must even return an honest 'yes' to the enquiry of the murderer who breaks into my house and asks whether my friend whom he is pursuing has taken refuge there; In such a case self-righteousness of conscience has become outrageous presumption and blocks the path of responsible action.
>
> (p. 213-4)

In distinction to this the Christian's action is directed not simply by a formal principle but responsibly by the concrete claim of God and the neighbour. And because of sin, individual and corporate, responsible action in a specific circumstance may be an assumption of guilt in the telling of a lie. Bonhoeffer is quite explicit here:

> If I refuse to incur guilt against the principle of truthfulness for the sake of my friend, if I refuse to tell a robust lie for the sake of my friend (for it is only the self-righteously law abiding conscience which will pretend that, in fact, no lie is involved), if in other words, I refuse to bear guilt for charity's sake, then my action is in contradiction to my responsibility which has its foundation in reality.
>
> (p. 214)

What conclusions should we draw from this particular passage? It seems unavoidable to conclude that we are moving here in the realm of casuistry. There does exist an ideal law of God commanding truthfulness and forbidding the lie — Bonhoeffer's repeated emphasis on the 'responsible acceptance of guilt' indicates this. There would be no guilt if a divine law were not being transgressed. But our involvement in a social structure corrupted by sin, our being 'in Adam', makes an unqualified application of the law impossible, morally speaking. It is necessary to let the law cast its light on specific events to reveal God's holy will, but it is also necessary that the reality of events be permitted to take a hand in shaping the actual decision and deed.

In an incompleted article written in Tegel Prison called "What is Meant by 'Telling the Truth'?" Bonhoeffer devoted himself to a systematic treatment of the question of truth and lying. Between the composition of the passages in the Ethics cited above and the composition of this article, a significant change took place in Bonhoeffer's thought — a change which makes it difficult for us to give a precise reply to the question, "Is there an absolute divine prohibition of lying."

Basing ourselves on the earlier passages of the Ethics we would have to conclude that Bonhoeffer answered the question neg-

atively. His conviction that historical necessity requires that we accept guilt by transgressing ideal moral principles in favour of the concrete claim of God and the neighbour, should lead us to believe that he felt that on occasion God actually commands lying. By lying, it should be remembered, I mean the failure to express one's thoughts in corresponding speech. Although it may be necessary in a certain context to lie, the necessity does not deprive the law of its status as a lie. A necessary lie is still a lie. That is why Bonhoeffer speaks of accepting guilt.

But in the later article written in Tegel Prison Bonhoeffer shifts his ground. He no longer wishes to dignify the lie with the dress of historical and moral necessity. He writes, "Since the term lie is quite properly understood as meaning something which is quite simply and utterly wrong, it is perhaps unwise to generalize and extend the use of this term so that it can be applied to every statement which is formally untrue." (p.331). On this basis, that speech which is morally required by God in a concrete situation could not properly be called a lie even if it did not correspond with the thoughts of the speaker. If it is commanded by God, it must be telling the truth. "Every word I utter is subject to the requirement that it shall be true." (p.328).

It becomes clear that truth telling and lying are now re-defined. Truth telling is not simply a correspondence between

speech and thought; it is a correspondence between speech and reality. "The real is to be expressed in words. That is what constitutes truthful speech." (p.327). Correspondence with reality is a far more complex affair than simple correspondence with thought. For speech to correspond with reality it is necessary to take into account the entire context in which speech is uttered. This includes the person who prompts the speaking and the status of the speaker, his office in life and his responsibilities. As Bonhoeffer says:

> Account must be taken of one's relationships at each particular time. The question must be asked whether and in what way a man is entitled to demand truthful speech of others. Speech between parents and children is, in the nature of the case, different from speech between man and wife, between friends, between teacher and pupil, government and subject, friend and foe, and in each case the truth which this speech conveys is also different.
>
> (p.326)

Moreover, regard must be given to "the place at which I stand" (p.333), that is, the concrete historical situation in which one is immersed. And finally, telling the truth requires a careful and reflective relating to this whole personal and historical context of the object about which an assertion is made.

Bonhoeffer's meaning would be fairly easy to grasp if we take him to be saying that while truth telling must have as its precondition veracious contents, that is, correspondence

between thought and speech, it is not exhausted by this formal truth, but requires the contextual evaluation described above to be wholly true. As Bonhoeffer writes in a letter of December 15, 1943, "The man who tells the truth out of cynicism is a liar." (p.54).

But I want to press the question and ask if an assertion that is technically or formally false can claim to be telling the truth. Can telling the truth in the living sense paradoxically mean that we must tell a lie in the formal sense?

Bonhoeffer illustrates this discussion by the story of the school master who asks a child in front of the class whether it is true that his father often comes home drunk. This is a fact, but the child denies it. Now in the formal sense the child may be said to have lied, but on a deeper level he has given expression to the reality of the family; the family is an institution with which the teacher ought not to interfere.

Now, are we to call the child's assertion a lie or not? At one point Bonhoeffer suggests that we should regard it as a lie or formal untruth, all the while recognizing that it contains 'living truth' about the reality of the family. Moreover, Bonhoeffer tells us that the experienced person learns to tell the truth in a comprehensive way that avoids the formal lie and at the same time expresses the reality of concrete situations and personal relations. Ideally, an assertion will be true on both

levels: On the level of formal correspondence with the speaker's thoughts, and more importantly, on the level of correspondence with reality.

In appraising an ambigious assertion that combines both elements in a contradictory way — a statement that is formally false but existentially true — we should give greater weight to the element of correspondence with reality, and probably describe it as telling the truth. But this kind of judgement 'on the balance' does not confuse the fact that the misrepresentation in speech of our thoughts is lying — even if justified on occasion. This conclusion is supported by Bonhoeffer's approval in the Ethics of the robust lie, the deliberate participation in guilt through uttering a lie on behalf of the neighbour.

We should probably insist that Bonhoeffer's reluctance noted above to designate all formally false speech as a lie serves only to confuse language. The fact that he puts forward this re-definition of moral concepts in only a tentative way, suggests that he himself is unwilling to confuse moral categories. It is important that he extended the notion of telling the truth far beyond the accepted norm of formal correspondence between thought and speech, to include the existential context in which speech is expected. A synoptic view of Bonhoeffer's writings encourages me to believe that Bon-

hoeffer would agree that it is more precise to retain the term 'lie' for its common sense use of hiding thoughts, while recognizing the formal truth is only a part of what is involved in telling the truth in a comprehensive and realistic way. This construction accords well with his stress on our involvement in guilt for the sake of others. This way, formal moral principles retain their clarity but they are not seen as simply applicable to life, but rather historically adaptable.

4. Truth in the Letters and Papers from Prison

In a poignant passage in a paper called "After Ten Years" Bonhoeffer confesses — even in these few lines the heavy sense of regret comes through — that he and his colleagues have been guilty of failure in telling the truth. "We have learned the art of deception and of equivocal speech. Experience has made us suspicious of others, and prevented us from being open and frank." (p.148).

But we are assured that this lying is not to be regarded as the pure and original intention of God. First, it is implied that the lying has been necessitated by the evil character of their concrete circumstances. "We have been the silent witnesses of evil deeds. Many storms have gone over our heads...Bitter conflicts have made us weary and even cynical." (p.148). Only the demonic quality of the Nazi regime against which the Church had to struggle for its place can justify the deviation from God's law to tell the truth. But there is no doubt that there does exist a divine law regarding truth telling.

Bonhoeffer longs for that future state of affairs when the demonic powers and institutions shall have been put down and he and his friends can return to God's original requirement that his people tell the truth. He writes:

> Are we still serviceable? It is not the genius that we shall need, not the cynic, not the misanthropist,

> not the adroit tactician, but honest straight forward men. Will our spiritual reserves prove adequate and our candor with ourselves remorseless enough to enable us to find our way back to simplicity and straightforwardness?
>
> (p.148)

This passage points us in the direction of an ethic of casuistry. It is acknowledged that there does exist an objective decree of God concerning our speech to one another. God did intend that his creature made in his image should tell the truth. But this acknowledgement of the divine law is coupled with the sad recognition that we have so polluted our relations with our brothers that unqualified truth telling, where our words and thoughts are at one, is not always morally possible. There are times when to say exactly what we think will be to violate God's command for that occasion and cause more hurt and evil than would be caused by our acceptance of guilt in lying.

There are a few other passages in the Letters and Papers from Prison that while they do not add appreciably to the article on truth-telling in the Ethics, do serve to reinforce its point of view.

The first is in a letter dated November 27, 1943, following an air raid, in which Bonhoeffer writes to his friend:

> People are talking quite openly about how terrified they were. I don't quite know what to make of it. Surely terror is something we ought to be ashamed of, something we ought not to talk about except in confession, otherwise it is bound to involve a certain amount of exhibitionism. On the other hand naive frankness can be utter-

> ly disarming. Yet there is also a cynical, I might almost say ungodly, kind of frankness, the kind generally associated with drunkenness and whoredom, which is a sign of chaos. I am inclined to think that terror is one of the pudenda, one of the things that ought to be concealed.
>
> (pp.46-7)

In a letter written on Advent II, 1943, Bonhoeffer says, "Why is it that in the Old Testament men lie so frequently and on such a grand scale to the glory of God (I have collected together all the instances)..." (p.50).

In the same letter Bonhoeffer writes most trenchantly:

> I have been thinking over what I said in a recent letter about our own fear. I am inclined to think that in this matter we are all too prone to pretend to be honest and "natural" over something which is really a sympton of sin. In fact, it is just like talking openly about sex. It is not always "honest" to reveal secrets. It was God who made clothes for men, which means that in statu corruptionis there are many things in human life which ought to be kept covered over, and evil at any rate ought to be left concealed if it is too early to eradicate it. To uncover is the mark of cynicism, and when the cynic prides himself on his honesty and pretends to be an enthusiast for truth, he overlooks the really important point that since the fall reticence and secrecy are essential.
>
> (p.51)

All of these passages support the contention that in man's sinful state it may happen that God will command that a Christian lie in order to do good in the given circumstances. There is not an unconditional prohibition on lying. Sometimes, to lie is to do God's work of love for the neighbour. We have underlying Bonhoeffer's assertions here, an ethic of casuistry.

5. Conclusions on Truth and Lying

The passages from The Cost of Discipleship support the contention that there is an absolute prohibition of lying and that under no conditions will God command a lie. This implies an ethic of law in which what God wills is known in advance of any actual situation requiring decision and action by referring to the explicit imperatives of the Scriptures. The conclusions drawn from The Cost of Discipleship on the question of truth are much the same as those drawn with respect to the test-cases of life and sex.

We see, though, that just as in the other test-cases of life and sex there was a change from an absolutist ethic of law in The Cost of Discipleship to a casuistic ethic relatively free from law in the Ethics and Letters and Papers from Prison, so here in regard to truth. With the exception of a single suggestive passage in the Ethics all the evidence serves to establish an ethic of casuistry or responsible action. The revealed law forbidding falsehood remains as the norm for Christian conduct, but it is not an absolute command to be realized willy-nilly. In certain situations our obedience to the living command of God who desires that we shall work for the well-being of our neighbour, may compel us to tell a lie. The lie remains a lie — a violation of God's original intention in creation — but its

guilt is willingly assumed in order to do the work of love, in obedience to God, in the fallen world in which we live.

IV. RESPONSIBLE ACTION — BONHOEFFER'S GENERAL THEORY OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

My approach thus far has been to examine the three areas of life, sex, and truth, and to discover Bonhoeffer's position on the test cases of killing, committing adultery and lying. It is my opinion that the possibilities that a man will entertain with respect to these deeds frequently reveals the real presuppositions of his ethical thought more than any investigation of his explicit moral theories. I do not think it is unfair to say that we have found some inconsistency in Bonhoeffer's position. I am quite certain, nevertheless, that what has emerged from this investigation is the fact that normally underlying his mature ethical judgements is a casuistic ethic. Bonhoeffer acknowledges the existence of an objective divine will articulated in formal laws, but at the same time he recognizes that historical reality, vitiated by sin, creates the paradox that sometimes to obey God's command of love requires that we assume guilt and transgress the moral law.

In this chapter I intend to examine some of the theoretical passages chiefly in the Ethics (as distinguished from the practical issues discussed above) with a view to determining whether his speculative statements substantiate the conclusions drawn above.

1. The Law is Inadequate: Freedom is Necessary

I want to set out some passages from Bonhoeffer's Ethics that indicate his conviction that a rational, formal set of principles or laws cannot serve as a sufficient guide for conduct which is an authentic response to the command of the living God. The law is inadequate for the reasons that follow.

a. The law is rational and the rational cannot express the wholeness and subtlety of the living God's real commands.

It has become almost a metaphysical truism that rational formulations abstract universal features from reality and cannot therefore be said to convey the concrete individuality of the object described. This is true of all levels of existence but especially of God who is unique. If God's reality escapes precise conceptualization and verbalization, we have little logical ground for supposing that his living and specific plans for us can be readily framed in formal propositions. In this regard Bonhoeffer writes, "The wise man is aware of the limited receptiveness of reality for principles; for he knows that reality is not built upon principles but that it rests upon the living and creating God." (p.7). In another place he writes, "Christ is not the proclaimer of a system of what would be good to-day here and at all times. Christ teaches no abstract ethics such as must at all costs be put into practice." (p.22).

b. Universally valid laws cannot take into account the idiosyncrasies of concrete situations where action is demanded.

In the foregoing proposition (a) we examined the thesis that the abstract, rational, principle or law cannot encompass the actual will of the living God. Here we take note of the fact that the same principle or law cannot deal specifically and concretely with the individual ethical circumstances. Bonhoeffer makes this point many times throughout his Ethics.

> Christ was not, like a philosopher, interested in the 'universally valid', but rather in that which is of help to the real and the concrete human being. What worried Him was not like Kant, whether 'the maxim of an action can become a principle of general legislation', but whether my action is at this moment helping my neighbour to become a man before God.
>
> (p.22)

And again he tells us that, "Timeless and placeless ethical discourse lacks the concrete warrant which all authentic ethical discourse requires." (p.237). Because the will of God is addressed to a concrete place Christian action cannot normally be anticipated; the nature of the appropriate deed must await the critical even in which the decision is required. As Bonhoeffer says, "The will of God is not a system of rules which is established from the outset; it is something new and different in each different situation in life, and for this reason a man must ever anew examine what the will of God may be." (p.161).

c. The ethic of law does not foresee the ends or consequences of acts but is concerned only that the way prescribed in the law be followed.

The result is moral fanaticism with its attendant futility. Of this Bonhoeffer writes in the Letters and Papers from Prison:

> Worse still is the total collapse of moral fanaticism. The fanatic imagines that his moral purity will prove a match for the power of evil, but like a bull he goes for the red rag instead of the man who carries it, grows weary and succumbs. He becomes entangled with non-essentials and falls into the trap set by the superior ingenuity of his adversary.
>
> (p.135)

d. As a result, the radical performance of the law may sometimes lead to a greater evil than would result from adaptation of the law to reality.

Bonhoeffer asserts that "A 'good attitude' may often be the source of the worst of actions." (p.59). In the section "Correspondence With Reality" he writes, "It is not an 'absolute good' that is to be realized; but on the contrary it is part of the self-direction of the responsible agent that he prefers what is relatively better to what is relatively worse and that he perceives that the 'absolute good' may sometimes be the very worst." (p.197).

e. The law may not be relevant to historical necessity.

The pursuit of the imperatives of the law only, may close the agent's eyes to the necessity for courses of action elicited by historical forces. Bonhoeffer makes the point as follows:

> In the course of historical life there comes a point where the exact observance of the formal law of a state, of a commercial undertaking, of a family, or for that matter of a scientific discovery, suddenly finds itself in violent conflict with the ineluctable necessities of the lives of men; at this point responsible and pertinent action leaves behind it the domain of principle and convention, the domain of the normal and regular, and is confronted by the extraordinary situation of ultimate necessities, a situation which no law can control. It was for this situation that Machiavelli in his political theory coined the term necessita.
>
> (p.207)

f. The law may become an idol worshipped in place of the living Lord who gives the law.

The ultimate goal of all conduct is not the performance of a law but "the realization among God's creatures of the revelational reality of God in Christ..." (p.57). In the section "Conscience" Bonhoeffer writes, "The origin and the goal of my conscience is not a law but it is the living God and the living man as he confronts me in Jesus Christ. For the sake of God and of men Jesus became a breaker of the law." (p.213).

Responsible action recognizes that Christ himself continues to exercise his guiding role in every moral situation. Christ is not made unnecessary, ethically, speaking, by the existence of a

general law for conduct. Bonhoeffer says in Life Together:

> Jesus Christ stands between the lover and the others he loves. I do not know in advance what love of others means on the basis of the general idea of love that grows out of my human desires. (p.25)

g. The law may be hard-hearted. In exploring the meaning of the "Penultimate" Bonhoeffer points critically at those who attempt a 'radical' solution to the problem of the relation of the ultimate ("justification by grace through faith") to the penultimate (human existence before the consumation). In the radical solution there is no sense of "correspondence with reality"; accommodation of the law to concrete events is repudiated. Of this solution Bonhoeffer says, "The last word of God, which is a word of mercy, here becomes the icy hardness of the law which despises and breaks down all resistance." (p.86).

h. Action which is motivated by something more than undeviating allegiance to the moral law will be more receptive to the needs of the neighbour.

About this Bonhoeffer says:

> Thus it is Jesus Christ who sets conscience free for the service of God and of our neighbour; He sets conscience free even and especially when man enters into the fellowship of human guilt. The conscience which has been set free from the law will not be afraid to

> enter into the guilt of another man for the other man's sake...The conscience which has been set free is not timid like the conscience which is bound by the law, but it stands wide open for our neighbour and for his concrete distress.
>
> (p.213)

And the relief of the neighbour's need is the meaning of Christian love which we saw is the starting point of Christian ethics and, now we may add, its ending point.

2. Yet the Moral Law Does Exist

Though reliance on the moral law alone is inadequate for framing responsible decisions, we must recognize that there is a divinely ordained moral law. The moral law is necessary for the reasons that follow.

a. The law provides a framework within which concrete ethical decisions should be made.

To use another metaphor, the law is a guiding beacon in moral perplexity. Without an objective and constant law articulating what God's ideal intentions are, there would be no anchor for our moral decisions. Though historical necessity may dictate an adaptation or compromise of the law, the law still provides the direction towards which our conduct should tend. There are a number of passages in the Ethics that show that though the law is inadequate and must be supplemented with freedom, the law still must be taken into account:

> Even when it is set free in Jesus Christ conscience still confronts responsible action with the law, through obedience to which man is preserved in that unity with himself which has its foundation in Jesus Christ. Disregard for this law can give rise only to irresponsibility. This is the law of love for God and for our neighbour as it is explained in the decalogue, in the sermon on the mount and in the apostolic parenesis. ...But the law is no longer the last thing; there is still Jesus Christ; for that reason, in the contest between conscience and concrete responsibility, the free decision must be given for Christ.
>
> (pp.215-6)

In a moral decision the law must be reckoned with as one of the factors contributing to a right decision. Bonhoeffer says:

> The responsible man acts in the freedom of his own self, without the support of men, circumstances or principles, but with a due consideration for the given human and general conditions and for the relevant questions of principle.
>
> (p.217)

And again in the section "Vocation" Bonhoeffer writes:

> But is not all responsible action in one's calling confined within inviolable limits by the law of God as it is revealed in the ten commandments as well as by the divine mandates of marriage, labour and government? Would not any overstepping of these limits constitute an infringement of the manifest will of God?...Certainly there can be no responsible action which does not devote extremely serious consideration to the limit which is given through God's law, and yet it is precisely responsible action which will not separate this law from its Giver. It is only as the Redeemer in Jesus Christ that responsible action will be able to recognize the God who holds the world in order by His law; it will recognize Jesus Christ as the ultimate reality towards which it is responsible, and it is precisely by Him that it will be set free from the law for the responsible deed.
>
> (p.228-9)

A high place is given in Bonhoeffer's thought to the permanent value of the Decalogue for Christian conduct:

> The decalogue is the law of living, revealed by God, for all life which is subject to the dominion of Christ. It signifies liberation from alien rule and from arbitrary autonomy. It discloses itself to believers as the law of the Creator and the Reconciler. The decalogue is the framework within which a free obedience becomes possible in worldly life.
>
> (p.293)

This permanent relevance of the Decalogue is seen also in the earlier Life Together in the treatment of confession and communion. Bonhoeffer writes, "Self-examination on the basis of all Ten Commandments will therefore be the right preparation for confession." (p.107).

The law provides the norm or criterion for conduct, though not an absolute and inflexible precept. In writing about the "State and Church", Bonhoeffer says, "Government achieves such an action if it takes the contents of the second table as its criterion in its various particular historical situations and decisions." (p.305).

b. Violation of the law even when necessary, is acknowledged as guilt:

> The extraordinary necessity appeals to the freedom of the men who are responsible. There is now no law behind which the responsible man can seek cover, and there is, therefore, also no law which can compel the responsible man to take any particular decision in the face of such necessities. In this situation there can only be a complete renunciation of every law, together with the knowledge that here one must make one's decision as a free venture, together also with the open admission that here the law is being infringed and violated and that necessity obeys no commandment. Precisely in this breaking of the law the validity of the law is acknowledged, and in this renunciation of all law, and in this alone, one's own decision and deed are entrusted unreservedly to the divine governance of history.
>
> (pp.208-9)

To confess guilt for the transgression of the law even when one is acting necessarily out of free responsibility is to acknowledge the existence of a law that remains always relevant though not absolutely binding.

The enduring role of the law as judge of our conduct remains even when transgression of the law is dictated by historical necessity. In the Letters and Papers from Prison, Bonhoeffer writes:

> It is true that all great historical action is constantly disregarding these laws. But it makes all the difference in the world whether it does so on principle, as though it contained a justification of its own, or whether it is still realized that to break these laws is sin, even if it be unavoidable, and that it can only be justified if the law is at once re-instated and respected.
>
> (p.142)

c. Lawlessness evokes nemesis within history.

In the Letters and Papers from Prison Bonhoeffer affirms the existence of "Immanent Righteousness". The structure of creation is such that the pursuit of the law's precepts ordinarily results in happiness. Conversely, the violation of the law is followed normally by disastrous repercussions even within the historical process.

> The world is simply ordered in such a way that a profound respect for the absolute laws and human rights is also the best means of self-preservation. While these laws may on occasion be broken

> in case of necessity, to proclaim that necessity as a principle and to take the law into our own hands is bound to bring retribution sooner or later. (p.142)

The consequences of lawlessness suggest the wrath of God that inescapably follows upon the failure to honour God. (Romans 1:18 and 21).

This normal pattern of cause and effect — lawlessness and retribution — gives evidence of the existence of an objective order of life and the world that is reflected in the precepts of the law.

d. Lawlessness is personal lostness

Bonhoeffer writes, "With the destruction of the biblical faith in God and of all divine commands and ordinances, man destroys himself." (p.39). Without any divine law man is bewildered and finds himself without a concrete place in which God may confront him.

3. Responsible Action

a. Responsible action lies between law and freedom.

Responsible action is governed by the revealed divine law, but not absolutely; it retains the right to assume guilt by transgressing the law in the interest of a concrete command of the Living Lord designed to achieve the work of love in a particular circumstance. Responsible action is shaped by the needs of the situation but not completely, for then action would be mere opportunism or expediency. Responsible action is open to the judging and transforming word of God addressed to the situation. Responsible action is that response to the command of the Living Lord that repudiates "the partial responses which might arise, for example, from a consideration of utility or from particular principles". (pp.192-3).

This dialectical position of responsible action between the demands of the law and the free command of God for the particular situation is described at some length in the section "Freedom". In this context, obedience must be understood as obedience to the law.

> Obedience without freedom is slavery; freedom without obedience is arbitrary self-will. Obedience restrains freedom; and freedom ennobles obedience. Obedience binds the creature to the Creator, and freedom enables the creature to stand before the Creator as one who is made in His image. Obedience shows man that he must allow himself to be told what is good and what God requires of him (Micah 6:8); and liberty enables him to do good himself. Obedience knows what is good and does it, and freedom dares to act, and abandons to God the Judgement of good and evil. Obedience follows blindly and freedom has open eyes. Obedience acts without questioning and freedom asks what is the purpose. Obedience has its hands tied and freedom is creative.

> In obedience man adheres to the decalogue and in freedom man creates new decalogues (Luther). In responsibility both obedience and freedom are realized. Responsibility implies tension between obedience and freedom. There would be no more responsibility if either were made independent of the other. Responsible action is subject to obligation, and yet it is creative.
> (pp.220-1)

b. Responsible action is aware of the social matrix.

Under the concept "Deputyship", Bonhoeffer develops the idea that human inter-relatedness forbids ethical decisions that are made only in terms of individual responsibility to a moral standard and without regard for our responsibility to those who will feel the repercussions of our choices and acts. Taking the role of a father as illustrative of deputyship, Bonhoeffer writes:

> He is not an isolated individual, but he combines in himself the selves of a number of human beings. Any attempt to live as though he were alone is a denial of the actual fact of his responsibility. He cannot evade the responsibility which is laid on him with his paternity. This reality shatters the fiction that the subject, the performer, of all ethical conduct is the isolated individual. Not the individual in isolation but the responsible man is the subject, the agent, with whom ethical reflexion must concern itself.
> (pp.194-5)

This position represents a departure from the thought of The Cost of Discipleship. There, as we have seen, Bonhoeffer excluded social obligations as a factor to be considered in reach-

ing a decision as to what God wills. Only obedience to the revealed will is entertained; there can be no compromise necessitated by responsibility for others. Not that Bonhoeffer ever endorsed a hard-hearted disdain for the needs of others in the face of the law's obligations; rather, he maintained that to perform the law without qualification is in the long run the best thing for those for whom we are responsible. In The Cost of Discipleship, he writes, "Don't we act most responsibly on behalf of those entrusted to our care if we act in this aloneness?" (p.129).

In the Ethics, by contrast, the discernment of the concrete command of God requires that we take into account the social ramifications of our deeds. To act responsibly is now seen not as a solitary act but as an act that is socially aware. This participation in society for the sake of love and in obedience to the living command of God is even prepared to take upon itself the evil and guilt that permeates the social body.

> It is responsible action, if it is action which is concerned solely and entirely with the other man, if it arises from selfless love for the real man who is our brother, then, precisely because this is so, it cannot wish to shun the fellowship of human guilt.
>
> (p.210)

c. Responsible action allows the claims of the real situation to exert their proper influence in coming to a right decision. Therefore the right decision requires careful reflection on the situation.

In an ethic of pure law all that is required to discern God's will is knowledge of the revealed law. Ethical action is the following of a way described and enjoined by the moral code. One need fix one's gaze only on the revealed law that is to be put into effect; the unique quality of the occasion is a matter of relative indifference. This contrasts markedly with Bonhoeffer's view of responsible Christian action. He writes:

> The will of God is not a system of rules which is established from the outset; it is something new and different in each different situation in life, and for this reason a man must ever anew examine what the will of God may be. The heart, the understanding, observation and experience must all collaborate in this task.
>
> (p.161)

In responsible action it is necessary to understand the real nature of the context in which decision and action are to be made, and for this understanding a diligent study and appraisal is required. This conviction is set out in numerous places in the Ethics:

> But when all this has been said it is still necessary really to examine what is the will of God, what is rightful in a given situation, what course is truly pleasing to God; for, after all, there have to be concrete life and action. Intelligence, discernment, attentive observation of the given facts, all these now come into lively operation, all will be embraced and pervaded by prayer. Particular experiences will

> afford correction and warning.
>
> (p.163)
>
> Since we are not concerned with the realization of an unrestricted principle, it is necessary in the given situation to observe, to weigh up, to assess and to decide, always within the limitations of human knowledge in general.
>
> (p.203)

In distinction to the ethic of law where the purpose is to pursue the fulfillment of the law's demands regardless of consequences, the ethic of responsible action tries to anticipate the probable outcome of one's course of action.

The ends towards which our actions are directed and the probable consequences of our deeds become important data in arriving at a knowledge of God's will. As Bonhoeffer says, "It is he himself, who must observe, judge, weigh up, decide and act. It is man himself who must examine the motives, the prospects, the value and the purpose of his action. (p.217).

The responsible act is one that seeks to understand its environment and its ramifications in that environment.

d. Responsible action cannot be anticipated.

When one acts responsibly one cannot know in advance of the situation that calls forth the decision what one's course of action will be. This derives from the fact that responsible action is concrete — directed to a particular situation — and,

therefore, apart from that situation there can be no responsible action and, accordingly, no knowledge of it.

In making this point Bonhoeffer writes:

> The responsible man is dependent on the man who is concretely his neighbour in his concrete possibility. His conduct is not established in advance, once and for all, that is to say, as a matter of principle, but it arises with the given situation. He has no principle at his disposal which possesses absolute validity and which he has to put into effect fanatically, overcoming all the resistance which is offered to it by reality, but he sees in the given situation what is necessary and what is 'right' for him to grasp and to do. For the responsible man the given situation is not simply the material on which he is to impress his idea or his programme by force, but this situation is itself drawn in into the action and shares in giving form to the deed.
>
> (p.197)[1]

e. Responsible action permits the choice of the lesser of two evils.

One of the surest testimonies to the fact that sin has corrupted human history and institutions is the way in which high-principled choices sometimes result in more destruction and hurt than do compromises with principles. Responsible action that is freed from total obedience to the law is able on occasion to seek the achievement of results which, while admittedly evil, are less so than those that would be produced by an un-compromising adherence to the precepts of the law. As Bon-

hoeffer says, "A 'good attitude' may often be the source of the worst of actions." (p.59). Responsible action "has not to decide simply between right and wrong and between good and evil, but between right and right and between wrong and wrong. As Aeschylus said, "right strives with right". (p.217).

In the section "Reproduction and Nascent Life" Bonhoeffer gives a concrete example of a crisis involving the need to choose the lesser of two evils. He is discussing the benefits of sterilization as opposed to the principle of the inviolability of the body. In this connection, he writes:

> So the question now arises whether the inviolability of his body is to be forfeited in order to render possible certain bodily functions which are subject to a powerful physical urge. No unequivocal answer can be given to this question. It may be that the physical impulse is so intense that, according to the conscientious self-judgement of the individual concerned, it would constitute a danger to his own life and to the lives of others, and in such cases, for the sake of preserving the patient's life as a whole, sterilization will be the lesser evil.
>
> (p.136)

f. Responsible action is a matter of assessing limits.

Once the literal demands of the law have been abandoned as the absolute limits on human conduct, the question for ethics becomes: "What are the limits on what is possible, morally speaking, for the disciple? For there is no question in Bonhoeffer's

thought, as we have seen, of espousing an ethic of total freedom from law.

Responsible action is the ethical act that has sought to ascertain truly what are the limits beyond which it cannot pass and still remain faithful to the Lord.

With respect to sexual life, the sense of shame "marks the limit" beyond which no interference may pass. (p.138). It is wrong to use the bodily forces of the workman "without restriction." (p.139). On this subject of limits Bonhoeffer says further:

> The limit of responsible action lies in the fact that the deed ends in the grace and judgement of God and is bounded by the responsibility of our neighbours, and at the same time it becomes evident that it is precisely this limit which makes the action a responsible one.
>
> (p.204)

g. Responsible action is justified by grace.

When the disciple feels that the divine will is expressed entirely in the law, he can feel certain about the rightness of his acts assuming he is able to perform the law's precepts. But once it is conceded that the law does not exhaust the requirements of a responsible Christian deed, then certainty disappears. (There is, of course, the possibility of a sense of certainty through private inspirations, but such psychological certitude lacks the

persuasiveness that results from following objective and public regulations.)

We may hope that we have properly assessed the ethical environment and have rightly detected the limits on compromise of the law permissible within it, but we cannot be sure. We must act on faith, and trust God to acquit us of our sin by his grace and not through the validity of our deeds.

This conviction is reiterated throughout the Ethics:

> All ideological action carries its own justification within itself from the outset in its guiding principle, but responsible action does not lay claim to knowledge of its own ultimate righteousness. When the deed is performed with a responsible weighing up of all the personal and objective circumstances and in the awareness that God has become man and that it is God who has become man, then this deed is delivered up solely to God at the moment of its performance. Ultimate ignorance of one's own good and evil, and with it a complete reliance upon grace, is an essential property of responsible historical action. The man who acts ideologically sees himself justified in his idea; the responsible man commits his action into the hands of God and lives by God's grace and favour. (pp. 203-4)

It should be noted that in the quotation above, to act ideologically means to act strictly in accordance with formal principles. The justification of responsible action by grace is elaborated in another passage from the section "Freedom":

> Precisely in this respect responsible action is a free venture; it is not justified by any law; it is performed without any claim to a valid self-justification, and

therefore also without any claim to an ultimate valid knowledge of good and evil. Good, as what is responsible, is performed in ignorance of good and in the surrender to God of the deed which has become necessary and which is nevertheless, or for that very reason, free; for it is God who sees the heart, who weighs up the deed, and who directs the course of history.

(pp.217-8)

4. Responsible Action and Obedience

In some ways The Cost of Discipleship and the Ethics and the Letters and Papers from Prison seem worlds apart in their ethical perspectives. The Cost of Discipleship is a ringing invitation to all disciples to fulfill their calling by undeviating obedience to the Master. The explication of what this obedience means — especially in the commentary on the Sermon on the Mount — points to a radical adherence to the commands of Jesus expressed as universal principles of conduct.

The Ethics, in contrast with The Cost of Discipleship, seems to reflect the difference in attitude between a young iconoclastic revolutionary and a mature statesman who has detected the illusions of slogans. The Ethics speaks of historical necessity as well as the command of Christ; it refers to inescapable involvement in guilt as well as the unflinching following of Jesus.

One is tempted to conclude that Bonhoeffer had learned, through the German church struggle and his part in the resistance against Hitler, the necessity of compromise, a necessity not yet learned or not acknowledged in The Cost of Discipleship. But we must beware too facile a judgement here.

First, let us note that the idea of compromise, under-

stood as a deliberate human decision to contravene God's command is foreign to the Ethics, no less than to The Cost of Discipleship. We have seen, of course, that the moral necessity to compromise or adjust the law in certain cases is implicit in the concept of responsible action, but we must understand that this adjustment of the law to circumstances is made by God and not by man. It is not a case of the disciple knowing God's command for a situation and then deciding that its implementation is not advisable. Rather, it is a matter of the living Lord of the law himself deciding in a given situation that for the sake of love the law is not directly applicable and then conveying his concrete will to the disciple. This does, not, as we have seen, excuse the disciple from the necessity of exercising his critical and rational abilities in grasping the real nature of his situation and the relation of the eternal moral law to it. We must distinguish the evasions and concessions of men from the compromise with the law made by God and then uttered as a command to the disciple. The concrete command of the living God is not compromisable.

In The Cost of Discipleship this command was, generally speaking, seen as the implementation of the law, especially the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. In the Ethics God's command is viewed as the actual purpose that God wants achieved in a certain situation, a purpose that takes its point of departure

from the specific ordinances of the revealed law but is made relevant to the sinful historical context by the wisdom and power of God. But in neither case is there the possibility of compromise for the faithful disciple; the command must in both cases be obeyed. In both books there is the same call to obedience; only the specific content of the divine will that is to be obeyed is differently conceived.

That responsible action is obedient response to the concrete command of God and not an affair of human evasion of the hard will of God is amply demonstrated in the Ethics. Bonhoeffer feels that "it is evident that the only appropriate conduct of men before God is the doing of His will". (p.166).

God's command does not brook any concessions. I should emphasize here that throughout this thesis I use 'command' in a somewhat technical sense. The term 'command' designates the concrete or existential requirement that God intends we should fulfill in a particular situation. The command may itself be a compromise of the ideal divine law contained in the Decalogue and in the New Law of the Sermon on the Mount, but the point is that it is an accomodation of the law that God himself has seen fit to make for his own purposes. When the living God's will is conveyed as a call to action it is in the form of a command that must be obeyed. The command, accordingly, is distinguished from the law which contains God's will for his human creatures in a

general way. It* is what I have called God's ideal will, or antecedent will. It follows that the expression 'will of God' is used generically: it stands both for the antecedent, ideal purpose that God originally intended men to achieve, and the consequent or concrete purpose that is attainable in actual sinful circumstances.

A divergence from the revealed law on the part of a Christian is only possible, morally speaking, when God himself compromises this law and addresses this compromise made in heaven to the disciple as his concrete command to be done in the particular situation.

Bonhoeffer tells us in this respect, "The call of Christ alone, when it is responsibly obeyed in the calling, prevails over the compromise and over the conscience which this compromise has rendered insecure." (p.225).

So we see that even responsible action with its dimension of freedom from law is still a deed of complete obedience to God. Bonhoeffer says:

> Permission and liberty do not mean that God now after all allows man a domain in which he can act according to his own choice, free from the commandment of God, but this permission and this liberty arise solely from the commandment of God itself.
>
> (p.248)

That Bonhoeffer's stress on obedience to the commands of God, so challengingly evident in The Cost of Discipleship, con-

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* i.e. the revealed law

tinued to the end is seen in a stirring passage from the Letters and Papers from Prison:

> Who stands his ground? Only the man whose ultimate criterion is not in his reason, his principles, his conscience, his freedom or his virtue, but who is ready to sacrifice all these things when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and exclusive allegiance to God. The responsible man seeks to make his whole life a response to the question and call of God.
>
> (pp.136-7)

I have tried to establish the claim that both The Cost of Discipleship and Ethics, though superficially at variance, are joined by the common bond of obedience. I have stated that, generally speaking, the content of this obedience is viewed variously. In The Cost of Discipleship it is obedience to the revealed law, in the Ethics it is obedience to the responsible act commanded by God. But accuracy demands that we indicate that this is an over-simplification of the evidence. For even in The Cost of Discipleship there are passages which suggest that Bonhoeffer has already at that stage (1937) eschewed a strict ethic of law in favour of an ethic that makes room for free responsibility.

In his exegesis of Mark 2:14 in the chapter "The Call to Discipleship", Bonhoeffer asks:

> And what does the text inform us about the content of discipleship? Follow me, run along behind me! That

> is all. To follow in his steps is something which is void of all content. It gives us no intelligible programme for a way of life, no goal or ideal to strive after.
>
> (p.49)

Also this:

> At this critical moment nothing on earth, however sacred, must be allowed to come between Jesus and the man he has called — not even the law itself. Now, if never before, the law must be broken for the sake of Jesus; it forfeits all its rights if it acts as a barrier to discipleship. Therefore Jesus emerges at this point as the opponent of the law, and commands a man to follow him.
>
> (p.51)

I am compelled to conclude that within The Cost of Discipleship there is a latent conflict between an ethic of absolute law and an ethic of inspiration or freedom from law, though the burden of the exposition is in the direction of obedience to the law revealed in the Bible. In the Ethics this clash of moral theories is resolved in the concept of responsible action.[2]

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1] cf. the following from a sermon preached by Bonhoeffer at the age of twenty-eight:

> "A man's heart deviseth his way — but the Lord directeth his steps."...Man wants to look over his life from the beginning to the end. But God does not allow it. He wants man to go step by step, guided not by his own ideas of life but by God's word which comes to him at every step, whenever man asks for it. There is no word of God for the whole of our life. God's word is new and free to-day and tomorrow, it is only applicable to the very moment in which we hear it. God wants us to go step by step in order to drive us to Him for help again and again.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gesammelte Schriften, Band IV (Munchen: Chr.Kaiser Verlag, 1961). p.177.

[2] On this question of the development between The Cost of Discipleship and the Ethics and Letters and Papers from Prison we should note Bonhoeffer's reference to The Cost of Discipleship in a letter written July 21, 1944. He says:

> I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. It was in this phase that I wrote The Cost of Discipleship. To-day I can see the dangers of this book, though I am prepared to stand by what I wrote.
> Later I discovered and am still discovering up to this very moment that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to believe.
>
> (p.125)

We see here that Bonhoeffer acknowledges a development

in his thought, yet he stands by what he wrote in The Cost of Discipleship. I suggest that though the understanding of the form that the command takes has developed between the two periods, the unifying link is the concept of obedience.

VI. SUMMARY AND APPRAISAL

1. Summary

In this research I have attempted to establish whether Bonhoeffer believes Christian moral decisions ought to be made by referring to law — the prescriptions and prohibitions revealed in the Bible; or by attention to the command with which God inspires the believer in each individual situation; or by a relational process between law and freedom in which the law is an ultimate norm for behaviour but its specific relevance and application in concrete circumstances is decided by the living God who seeks love for the neighbour, though human reasoning is not excluded.

My approach has been to ascertain Bonhoeffer's position on the three test cases of life, sex, and truth. I have examined Bonhoeffer's writings to see whether he maintains that there is an absolute divine prohibition of killing, adultery and lying. I have uncovered some inconsistency. Bonhoeffer's statements on sex point, on the whole, to an absolute law forbidding adultery, but even here there are claims made for 'fellowship with Christ' and 'love' as the criteria for valid sexual intercourse which may be interpreted in terms of an ethic that is free from law either completely as in the ethic of inspiration, or partially as in the ethic of casuistry.

With respect to killing and lying, Bonhoeffer is unambiguous. Though there is an ultimate law prohibiting killing, obedient response to God's command may dictate its qualification in the interests of our responsibility to love the neighbour. Because human history has been corrupted by sin, there are times when God may command us to kill an evil doer in the course of our exercising responsible love for others. But this obedience to the living, existential command of God is coupled with the recognition that it is a transgression of God's ultimate will. Even as we obey the command we accept penitently the guilt in which the necessary act involves us.

In my investigation of the more theoretical passages I have observed that in some places Bonhoeffer expresses himself in a manner that conveys the impression that his thought is most compatible with that school of ethics that goes by the name of 'contexualist' or 'personalist' and disclaims reliance on principles or legal codes as the basis of ethical decisions and deeds. In other places Bonhoeffer displays a reverence for the law recorded in the Bible that suggests a legalist ethic. I have shown that he attempts to synthesize this regard for both freedom and the law in the concept of responsible action where law retains the force of a norm and the circumstances exert the power, under the guidance of God, to limit the application of the law.

In summary: The thesis that is established as a result of my research, and that is supported by the evidence adduced, is that Bonhoeffer holds that Christian ethical decisions should be made casuistically, though, as I have indicated before, he prefers the term 'responsible action' to designate conduct that is obedient to Christ.

2. Appraisal

a. Presuppositions Determine Evaluation.

In appraising this concept of responsible action, or as I have designated it, 'casuistry', the first question that should be asked is whether this view does accurately describe the way Christians do make their ethical decisions or the way they feel they ought to make them.

An assessment of Bonhoeffer's conclusions will depend, however, on the presuppositions with which we approach his work. For Christians these presuppositions will depend largely, in turn, on a theological interpretation of the Bible. Those Christians who hear God's voice concerning conduct most clearly in the legal codes of the Old Testament and in the New Law promulgated by Jesus in the New Testament, will tend to feel that an ethic of law most adequately represents the true pattern of Christian behaviour towards others. They will conclude that Bonhoeffer has undervalued (at least in his later works) the divine law by not insisting on the imperative to try to fulfill its literal demands in every situation. They will feel that his stress on freedom and historical necessity has weakened the proper obedience of the disciple to God's will articulated in the biblical law.

Those, on the other hand, who hear God's voice concerning moral conduct most clearly in the biblical assurances of freedom

from law and in the testimonies to the work of the Spirit that blows where it wills, will tend to feel that an ethic of inspiration is a more accurate description of the working of Christian love towards others. They will feel that Bonhoeffer has overstated the role of legalism in the redeemed person's life and would prefer an unspecified formula like Augustine's "Love God and do what you like".

It is clear, then, that any evaluation of Bonhoeffer's theory of conduct will be determined by the prior weight attributed to the scriptural passages that sound like absolute, unqualified laws. How should we, for example, understand passages like: "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock." (Matthew 7:24).

The problem is evidenced by the fact, adumbrated in my introduction, that many Christian scholars seem unable to decide conclusively as to the relative merits of law and freedom both of which are capable of biblical support.

To the question: Do I personally believe that Bonhoeffer has accurately described the way Christian moral decisions ought to be made?, I would answer a provisional 'yes'. The way of responsible action with its dialectic between law and freedom does seem the way Christians usually proceed when

confronted by a crisis that demands response and decision although I should imagine that the term most frequently used to designate this approach is 'compromise'. 'Compromise', I have had occasion to note, is not a term that Bonhoeffer finds congenial because of its overtones of deliberate denial of the command of God, a possibility that the true disciple cannot entertain.

b. Is the Law Eternally Normative?

Where I find myself somewhat uneasy, however, is in the presence of Bonhoeffer's high regard for the continuing validity of the revealed law. There are two objections that I feel constrained to raise: the first, a hermeneutical one; the second, a philosophical one.

With regard to the problem of scriptural interpretation, I should like to ask whether we are entitled to ascribe to the legal codes of the covenant community the same high status as we accord to the narrative of God's gracious and redemptive acts among his people. There is considerable force in the argument that the legal codes are the empirical discoveries of the community as to what makes for its social and physical well-being, discoveries which are subsequently accorded divine sanction by being regarded as direct deliverances from God.

If this sociological rather than revelational view of biblical law be accepted, then the casuistic ethic that relies on the anchor of revealed law suffers a further loss of certitude. For if the law is sociologically conditioned then its relevance will be mitigated as society alters its form. It is not necessary to draw the conclusion that the law is then of no value whatsoever. It will have to be viewed, however, not as the ultimate, ideal intention of God for his human creation, but as the accumulated wisdom of the ages as to what courses of action in the past have made for the most favourable conditions in the community. A casuistic process would still be necessary, but now it would not comprise a relation between ideal, divine law and circumstances, but between relative, sociologically conditioned mores and concrete situations.

In this case the role exercised by law in the dialectical process of law and freedom would be considerably less than where the principles and legal codes are regarded as divine deliverances.

On the subject of biblical interpretation, another point should be raised. When the attempt is made to find objective, scriptural guidance for the Christian way of life (in distinction from the subjective, direct leading of the risen Christ), the stress usually falls on the teaching of Jesus and especially those sayings which appear to be ethical imperatives for the disciple.

Now, is it not possible that this emphasis on the ethical teaching of Jesus is misplaced? At this point, I want to put forward tentatively the notion that the way of life for the disciple is not given chiefly in the ethical sayings, but is acted out in the life of Jesus as a kind of historical parable. It is the stories of the activity of Jesus in his ministry and passion and crucifixion that implant in us a sense of his way of life that is to be formed in us.

The ethical sayings should not be discounted; they are an attempt to say in a formal and universal way what is given realistically and concretely in the actions of Jesus. But they are secondary to the narrative of the deeds of the Incarnate Lord. I am proposing an 'Incarnational ethic' in contrast with a legal or formal ethic.

MacIntyre had something like this in mind when he wrote, "Myths are in fact directive of the moral life just at those points where rules become no longer relevant."[1] But where MacIntyre says 'myths' I would substitute 'historical narrative'.

The second qualification with respect to Bonhoeffer's view of law is a philosophical one. I have pointed out how Bonhoeffer himself recognizes the limitations of the rational to grasp reality. Rational language abstracts from reality; it

isolates generalities which must not be confused with the concrete particularity of reality. Now, law is a rational formulation and therefore suffers from this inadequacy. The law attempts to isolate certain universal qualities of conduct, but in so doing it fails to convey the fullness — the style — of concrete ethical action. If the law is inherently, by its very nature as rational formulation, unable to convey fully the wholeness of the command of the living and loving God directed to a personal situation, then its claim to serve as ideal norm is called into question. For the real command of God is always something more than the directive enjoined in the law. Perhaps, only an allegiance to the written word in the Bible akin to Bonhoeffer's can maintain the law's character as eternal criterion of what God wills. Otherwise, the alternative seems to be a situational ethic where law serves only as an abstract generalization of past ethical experience and is in no theological way authoritative for future decision. Granted this assessment of rational formulations, then the law, being an abstraction from a series of ethical events, can never be a substitute for the concrete command of the living God.

I am not yet able to decide conclusively as a matter of personal conviction how much weight should be given to this hermeneutical and philosophical doubt about the law's nature

and consequent authority. I am, however, disposed to accord considerable strength to these objections and this leads to placing more emphasis on freedom rather than law in the law-freedom dialectic. Any thorough and systematic treatment of the place of law and freedom in Christian ethics must attempt to clarify the character and status of law. I suspect, however, that when all the exegetical and linguistic labours have been done, the significance given to law will depend on a decision of faith — a decision corroborated in the personal experience of the agent.

c. How Are Law and Personal Situation Related?

Another question that I find insufficiently answered in Bonhoeffer's ethics is how the casuistic solution is arrived at. How do we know when the revealed law is to be strictly implemented and when it is to be adapted to circumstances? And when some responsible compromise or adaptation of the ideal will of God is seen to be necessary, how do we discover where the moral line ought to be drawn; how do we ascertain what are the limits permissible in compromising the ultimate law? At times Bonhoeffer stresses the activity of the living God who himself determines the extent to which his law is applicable in a situation and who communicates this knowledge to the attentive believer by inspiration. Against this, or at least in addition to this work of God, there is the obligation laid on the believer to employ his reason to accurately diagnose the situation in

which he finds himself, and the probable consequences of various courses of action. The ethical decision in this case seems to depend on the agent's discernment in applying the general laws to his particular situation.

I have been able to discover no comprehensive and coherent answer to this question of the relative roles of inspiration and calculation in moral decisions. Undoubtedly both enter into the picture and there need exist no contradiction between them. It is possible to resolve the apparent conflict between human and divine initiatives by contending that God manifests his will not only by direct inspiration but through man's honest and diligent exercise of his faculties.

I believe it is accurate to say that in Bonhoeffer the emphasis does fall on waiting attentively for God to make known his command through the risen Lord, rather than on rational calculation. But even here human responsibility and co-operation are indispensable. For only the person who has steeped himself in the private and corporate worship so beautifully described in Life Together is in a position to hear God's commands. Only the person who searches the scriptures that record the Incarnate Lord's deeds and opens his spirit to God in prayer will be sensitive to Christ's promptings as he comes to lead the believer into an understanding of what love for the neighbour requires in every new situation.

Wherever the apostolic testimony to his earthly deeds is faithfully expounded, the risen Christ comes and gathers up this narrative and uses it to create in the hearer the true sense of the Christian way of life. The living Christ imparts his own life to the believer and the believer begins to conform to the deeds of the Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen One. "It is Christ who shapes men in conformity with Himself". [2] To be in conformity with Christ is to live by that love with which he has loved us.

But though we are conformed to Christ and his love, we do not yet live the perfect life of heaven: our loving care for the neighbour exists in tension between the ideal of God and the possibilities inherent in sinful history:

> Christian life is the dawning of the ultimate in me; it is the life of Jesus Christ in me. But it is always also life in the penultimate which waits for the ultimate. [3] (p.99)

And so we seek to live as responsibly and lovingly as light and grace enable us, in the end trusting God for our justification.

Action

Do and dare what is right, not swayed by the whim of the moment.
Bravely take hold of the real, not dallying now with what might be.
Not in the flight of ideas but only in action is freedom.
Make up your mind and come out into the tempest of living.
God's command is enough and your faith in Him to sustain you.
Then at last freedom will welcome your spirit amid great rejoicing. [4]

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, Metaphysical Beliefs (London: SCM, 19), p.191.

[2] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p.18.

[3] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p.99.

[4] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p.xv

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