RETRIEVING A THEOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY FOR COMMUNITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH FROM DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S *LIFE TOGETHER*

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

---

by

Nicholas James Abraham

May 2018

APPROVAL SHEET

RETRIEVING A THEOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY FOR COMMUNITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH FROM DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S *LIFE TOGETHER*

Nicholas James Abraham

Read and Approved by:

_____
Michael A. G. Haykin (Faculty Supervisor)

_____
Joseph C. Harrod

_____
Stephen J. Nichols

Date_____

For Gidu,

who now fully knows the peace of God in Christ Jesus.

For Anna,

my relentlessly encouraging and loving wife.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

Page

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	*Act and Being*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
CD	*The Cost of Discipleship*
DBWE	*Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, English ed.
DBWE 1	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 1, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.
DBWE 2	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 2, *Act and Being*. Edited by Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. Translated by H. Martin Rumscheidt. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.
DBWE 4	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 4, *Discipleship*. Edited by Geffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. Translated by Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
DBWE 5	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 5, *Life Together* and *Prayerbook of the Bible*. Edited by Geffrey B. Kelly. Translated by Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005
DBWE 9	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer, 1918–1927.* Edited by Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson. Translated by Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Scott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.
DBWE 10	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 10, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York, 1928–1931.* Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Douglas W. Scott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
DBWE 11	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 11, *Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work: 1931–1932.* Edited by Victoria J. Barnett, Mark S. Brocker, and Michael B. Lukens. Translated by Anne Schmidt-Lange, Isabel Best, Nicolas Humphrey, and Marion Pauck. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.
DBWE 12	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 12, *Berlin: 1932–1933.* Edited by Larry L. Rasmussen. Translated by Isabel Best and David Higgins. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

DBWE 13	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 13, *London, 1933–1935.* Edited by Keith Clements. Translated by Isabel Best. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007
DBWE 14	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 14, *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937.* Edited by H. Gaylon Barker and Mark S. Brocker. Translated by Douglas W. Scott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.
DBWE 15	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 15, *Theological Education Underground: 1937–1940.* Edited by Victoria J. Barnett. Translated by Victoria J. Barnett, Claudia D. Bergmann, Peter Frick, and Scott A. Moore. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.
DBWE 16	Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 16, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment 1940–1945*. Edited by Mark S. Brocker. Translated by Lisa E, Dahl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
LT	*Life Together*
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary
SC	*Sanctorum Communio*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

PREFACE

One cannot adequately put into words the impact a good pastor can have. My interest in Dietrich Bonhoeffer began during seminary over many cups of coffee with my pastor at the time, Dale Boston. He instilled in me a love for reading, but also the discipline to actually read. *Life Together* was woven throughout our conversations, and it was from Dale that I first heard about Bonhoeffer. Dale pointed me to Christ again and again, and he continues to do so through our friendship. He also encouraged me to look to others that would point me to Christ as well. Bonhoeffer became one of those voices for me. Then Dale and I attended the Wheaton Theology Conference in 2012, which was devoted to Bonhoeffer. I was hooked. From that moment, I knew I wanted to write about Bonhoeffer. I am grateful for Dale's influence in my life.

In so many ways this work would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my church, Alpine Bible Church in Sugarcreek, Ohio. The freedom my Lead Pastor, Byron Stewart, and those on the board have given me to be what Christ has made me as a pastor is a gift that many would desire. The interest that the saints there have shown as they inquire about my studies and my writing is appreciated. The prayer offered on our family's behalf throughout this process is a tremendous grace. The love and support of friends, brothers, and sisters in our church is a debt I cannot repay.

The blessing and honor of getting to watch my gidu (Arabic for grandpa) step into the kingdom of heaven was a miraculous display of God's grace and mercy. Even when gidu did not understand what I was doing in the pastorate or in school, he supported me. I think he better understood what I was doing with my life after the Good Shepherd called him to himself in salvation before his death. I praise God that gidu now knows

communion with Christ far better than I do. God used him as another reason I was able to complete this work.

Several years ago, God orchestrated a conversation with my doctoral supervisor, Michael Haykin, about pursuing doctoral studies and writing on Bonhoeffer. This conversation led to his graciously agreeing to supervise me in this work. I am thankful for his leadership in this process and organizing meetings with me, even at The Gospel Coalition Conference, to discuss my progress and provide edits. This work would not be what it is without him. Others at SBTS have been such a blessing as I have tried to make my way to and through this work: Coleman Ford, Joe Harrod, and Don Whitney. I am also thankful for the friendship of Matt Purdom as we walked through this process together.

Michael DeJonge from the University of South Florida was kind enough to send me a prepublication copy of his book *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther*, which proved helpful in my work. Steven Bezner, pastor of Houston Northwest Church, sent me a copy of his Ph.D. dissertation on Bonhoeffer that was enlightening in several ways.

Matt Ellington, pastor of Stanwood Community Church, has been a friend who has stuck closer than a brother for more than two decades. His encouragement and hours spent with me in conversation have been part of the wonderfully refining process in discerning why I pursued doctoral studies as a pastor.

Last, but nowhere near least, my wife, Anna, has been a ferocious encouragement to me. She has pushed me when I doubted myself. She saw potential in me when I did not. She talked me through many evenings of stress through seminary. She has graciously and patiently stood with me through years of schooling and ministry. She has sacrificed much to be my helpmate, my friend, my encourager, and my sounding board. She is gifted as a pastor's wife, an amazing mother to our daughter, Nora, and the love of my life. Anna shows me the love and character of Christ as she serves our Lord alongside me. She is also a bit biased in thinking I am better than I really am.

I pray this labor of love will lead many to deeply marvel at the wonder of the Church, which Jesus bought with his blood. I pray it leads all who read it to see the blessing of Christian community. I pray it encourages many to take up and read Bonhoeffer and let him speak for himself. I pray it strengthens churches, emboldens pastors, and corrects those that have missed the blessings Jesus offers in and through his body.

All glory be to Christ!

Nick Abraham

Navarre, Ohio

May 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary church does not suffer from a failure to make community important. Many seem to understand the importance of togetherness. After all, Jesus prayed for those that would hear and believe in the apostolic testimony "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21 ESV). However, there is considerable confusion or perhaps disagreement about how to even define Christian community, let alone describe how it happens or how it is maintained. Often, community in the church today reflects worldly ideas. In the world, people generally prefer to be with other like-minded people doing and valuing common things that represent their particular culture. In response to this cultural desire, the world creates opportunities for community so that people with similar purposes and interests can come together. Such community is often valued because of what the members get out of it. People believe that the products of community, such as kindness and a sense of belonging, is community itself. Bringing cultural ideas of community into the church only results in more confusion. A familiar refrain today is the insightful declaration of John Piper: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."[1] The point of Piper's statement, in part, is to enjoy God for the sake of who he is, not merely because of what one gets from him. The same can be said of Christian community. It is to be loved and valued for what it is, which is community with, through, and in Christ.

---

[1]John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2011), 10.

The church of Jesus Christ is not simply a group of like-minded people gathered around a certain cause or idea accruing various membership benefits. Such a cheap vision of community roots itself in shallow theology. It lacks the vitality to adequately display the glory of Christ, which is what Christian community is meant to do. It also fails to provide practices that can maintain community, since the community it maintains is deficient. Furthermore, a cheap vision of community cannot attain the very thing for which Jesus prayed for the church, which was union with the Father and the Son. True Christian community must grow from richer theological soil. The production of such soil can come from nowhere else but the Bible. Community in the true church of Jesus Christ roots itself in this soil, because the Bible makes clear that Jesus himself is the soil.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) understood the richness of true Christian community in the face of opposing cultural narratives. In his book *Life Together*, he provided a vision for Christian community that was both biblical and practical. He grasped true community in the church because he lived and exemplified it. His confessional stance concerning Christ and the church rested in God's revelation to his people, namely the Bible. He had, what Robert Yarbrough called "confessional courage."[2] As a result, his concept of Christian community was theologically rich and not simply philosophical. He did not rely on cultural norms to drive his vision of community. He showed the importance of relying on God's revelation in the Bible for both the concept and practice of community in the church.

This thesis explains Bonhoeffer's view of community and argues that it must be retrieved for the contemporary church. In *LT,* he provided a timeless theological vision of community, which found its center in Christ and its ongoing maintenance in the ordinary means of grace and spiritual disciplines.

---

[2]Robert W. Yarbrough, "Bonhoeffer as Bible Scholar," *Themelios* 37, no. 2 (July 2012): 188.

Familiarity with the Literature

This thesis interacts with a variety of primary and secondary sources to retrieve Bonhoeffer's vision of community. The most important source is the writings of Bonhoeffer themselves. Fortress Press has published Bonhoeffer's complete works in seventeen volumes in English, and though all of the volumes will not be used at similar depths, most will be considered. The primary focus rests on *LT* as well as the material written prior to that in order to show the progression of his theology.[3] The development of Bonhoeffer's concept of community begins with the first volume in the series, *Sanctorum Communio*, which was his first doctoral dissertation.[4] This work provides the basis for key theological areas of Bonhoeffer's thought, which include the church and Christology. These key areas of Bonhoeffer's theology had a foundational impact on his vision of community. The additional volumes written between his dissertations and *LT* contain sermons, lectures, letters, and his other well-known work, *The Cost of Discipleship* or simply *Discipleship,* as it was originally titled.[5] The breadth of insight contained in all of Bonhoeffer's work demonstrates his devotion to rigorous theological study and his grasp of the doctrine of the church. Nevertheless, this thesis focuses on a few key portions of Bonhoeffer's body of work. Besides *LT*, particular attention will be paid to *SC* and two series of lectures Bonhoeffer gave during his time teaching in a university setting.

Several biographies of Bonhoeffer provide important sources for understanding his theology of community. The primary source for all other biographies of Bonhoeffer continues to be Eberhard Bethge's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography.*[6]

---

[3]*DBWE,* 5.

[4]*DBWE,* 1.

[5]*DBWE,* 4 and 9–15

[6]Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed., ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

Since Bethge was a close friend of Bonhoeffer's, he provided insight that only a close confidant could supply. That insight serves as a foundation for all subsequent biographies. In his massive work, Bethge discussed, with careful detail, nearly every facet of Bonhoeffer's life. Andrew Root rightly stated, "Bethge's thousand-page biography is unmatched."[7] The breadth and depth of Bethge's biography is truly its value, as it deals with all of the complexities of Bonhoeffer the man. Bethge's approach to Bonhoeffer, though being his friend, was commendable from an historiographical perspective. Bethge seemed determined to present the whole Bonhoeffer. Stephen Haynes pointed out that it was quite possibly Bethge's biography of Bonhoeffer that has maintained the high level of interest in Bonhoeffer over the years due to its combination of theology and biography.[8]

Other biographies also merit consideration. Ferdinand Schlingensiepen's biography provides a significant historical look at the events surrounding Bonhoeffer and the various chapters of his life.[9] Schlingensiepen's own father, Hermann Schlingensiepen, served as a Confessing Church pastor, which places Ferdinand close to the world of Bonhoeffer.[10] Furthermore, Bethge asked Schlingensiepen to write a shortened biography of Bonhoeffer in the late 1960s.[11] Though many celebrate and follow Bonhoeffer, Schlingensiepen noted: "But Bonhoeffer did not want to be venerated; he wanted to be heard."[12] It is that statement and particular viewpoint on

---

[7]Andrew Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 18.

[8]Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 6.

[9]Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, trans. Isabel Best (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

[10]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, ix.

[11]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, xvi.

[12]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, xvii.

Bonhoeffer as well as his own familial link to the Confessing Church that seems to have driven Schlingensiepen as he wrote on Bonhoeffer.

Charles Marsh has provided an intimate look at Bonhoeffer through private letters as well as an analysis of his theological influences in his biography of Bonhoeffer.[13] Marsh had access to the Dietrich Bonhoeffer archives in Berlin, which contains various personal effects belonging to Bonhoeffer, many of which are reflected in his complete works, but others that are not.[14] This personal, fresh perspective seems to have been Marsh's goal in his biography. Marsh wrote his biography in a compelling way, which followed his penchant for the intimate, complex details of Bonhoeffer's life.

Eric Metaxas' recent biography has popularized Bonhoeffer for a twenty-first century, evangelical, American audience.[15] Metaxas placed his biography of Bonhoeffer in the ongoing tradition of Bonhoeffer studies.[16] However, many give similar assessments of Metaxas' attempt to tell the story of Bonhoeffer as Andrew Root said of it, "I find [Metaxas' approach to Bonhoeffer] so flawed and earnest to paint Bonhoeffer as a conservative . . . that I cannot follow him in any way."[17] While Metaxas' biography is one of the more well-known recent books on Bonhoeffer, it was aimed at a popular market rather than an academic audience.

The final type of sources with which this thesis interacts consists of those that have dealt with specific aspects of Bonhoeffer's theology or life. A rich source of this type is a survey of Bonhoeffer's theology and life, called *Bonhoeffer on the Christian*

---

[13]Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

[14]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 395.

[15]Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

[16]Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, 578.

[17]Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 18n13.

Life: From the Cross, For the World, by Stephen Nichols.[18] This recent work provided helpful overviews of various aspects of Bonhoeffer. Nichols also offered valuable insights on Bonhoeffer's theology, such as his views on the spiritual disciplines, the church, and Christology, which Nichols called "the key for understanding Bonhoeffer's theology and also his view on the Christian life."[19]

Another recent work by Paul House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together*, looks at Bonhoeffer the seminary leader and educator of pastors.[20] It presented a vision for contemporary pastoral education using Bonhoeffer's methods and theology. House's own experience as a seminary professor and a self-proclaimed admirer of Bonhoeffer, provided a unique approach in applying *CD* and *LT* to theological education.[21] It is an example of how Bonhoeffer's theology can be appropriated today.

Prior to his recent biography, Charles Marsh wrote a volume studying Bonhoeffer's theology through a philosophical view.[22] This book dealt with Bonhoeffer's theological influences and his theology at a detailed level. Marsh outlined his major tasks in this book as the following: explore Bonhoeffer's theological relationship with the work of Karl Barth (1886–1968), display Bonhoeffer's use of and immersion in the world of philosophy, and discover how both of these things helped him to construct his approach to the social dimension of Christology.[23]

---

[18]Stephen J. Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life: From the Cross, For the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

[19]Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life*, 46.

[20]Paul R. House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

[21]House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision*, 12.

[22]Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[23]Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, vii–xi.

A book that deals with Bonhoeffer the churchman, which is less technical, yet recently published, is Andrew Root's *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together*.[24] Root's book looked at Bonhoeffer's time as a youth worker in various churches and the larger impact his theology had and could have on youth ministry. Root walked through the life of Bonhoeffer, along with his writings, showing the regularity of Bonhoeffer's ministry to and with young people. With a solid grasp on Bonhoeffer's major writings, Root retrieved Bonhoeffer's theology for the purpose of contemporary youth ministry.

Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at All Costs, by Mark Devine, is another book aimed at recovering Bonhoeffer for contemporary audiences.[25] Devine's book dealt with core aspects of Bonhoeffer's theology and sought to capture them for a contemporary evangelical audience. Devine summarized the life and writings of Bonhoeffer, while providing fresh insight and application to modern readers. Devine was confident that Bonhoeffer could help contemporary Christians follow Christ and so he wrote from that conviction.[26]

Though Bonhoeffer's own writings are vast and much of what has been written about him is sprawling, this thesis will also explore aspects of some of his influences. This includes some interaction with Martin Luther (1483–1546), Martin Buber (1878–1965), Karl Barth and others, which provide background for many of Bonhoeffer's own writings as he both relies on and critically deals with their work.

Void in the Literature

A survey of recent sources on Bonhoeffer shows that many authors focus on

---

[24]Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker.*

[25]Mark Devine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at All Costs* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005).

[26]Devine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today*, 2.

the impact of his political and ethical beliefs. Many of the biographies of Bonhoeffer do not attempt to apply Bonhoeffer's theology in any specific way to the contemporary church, which of course is not the goal of biography in the first place. Numerous sources often focus on his life under the Nazi regime and his death. Other sources tend to look at Bonhoeffer's contribution to individual piety and the Christian life. While these themes represent important parts of Bonhoeffer's life and ministry, they do not comprise the entirety of his legacy.

Bonhoeffer's writings are often addressed from a devotional standpoint and rightly so. *CD* is arguably a classic when it comes to understanding the Christian life. *LT* is also a powerful tool for one's own spiritual walk. However, Bonhoeffer's works need to be further applied beyond the individual Christian life, because his writing was not primarily devotional. Recent books have made attempts to relate his more popular works to contemporary evangelical Christianity but have not fully engaged the impact of his writings on the church.

Paul House's book *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision*, looks at both *CD* and *LT*, seeking to explain them for Christians today; however he does so in relation to incarnational theological education.[27] Stephen Nichols' book, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life*, draws out the impact of Bonhoeffer's theology on the church specifically on the topic of community, but does so briefly.[28] Andrew Root deals with some application of *CD* and *LT* to the church today, but limits his scope to youth ministry.[29] Mark Devine comes closest to this thesis by bringing out ways to apply Bonhoeffer to current issues in the church. However, his was a broader approach in that he keenly diagnosed many of the current cultural problems invading the church and how

---

[27]House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision*, 15–16.

[28]Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life*, 57–76.

[29]Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 171–208.

Bonhoeffer's theology speaks to them.[30]

Charles Marsh's book *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* is in the vein of many technical studies of Bonhoeffer and his theology. There was little emphasis on applying Bonhoeffer to lived experience, which is rather ironic since making serious theology practical was arguably one of Bonhoeffer's core principles. Marsh's book and others like it, are nevertheless valuable for looking at the theological and philosophical foundations that lie beneath the surface of Bonhoeffer's theology. Yet such studies do not take, nor are they meant to take, Bonhoeffer's theology into the sphere of regular, ecclesial practice.

What is lacking today is the application of Bonhoeffer's writings to the issue of ecclesiology. That is not to say that Bonhoeffer's work need only be used to construct a general theology of the church. Bonhoeffer can help fill a void in both doctrine and practice in a local church. The particular space that *LT* can speak into in contemporary ecclesiastical practice is in defining, describing, and maintaining true Christian community. Even in light of the challenges of modern society, Bonhoeffer is a witness to a rich, biblical vision of Christian community in a local church. However, recent studies of Bonhoeffer's theology do not go far enough in explaining how *LT* speaks to the average local church today. This thesis fills that void.

Thesis

The contemporary church is in need of a fresh vision for community, a vision that is biblical and not driven by cultural norms. In this thesis, I argue that in his work *LT,* Bonhoeffer provided that biblical vision of Christian community. Bonhoeffer showed how Christian community is created and maintained, not through fanciful or clever techniques, but in Christ through the ordinary means of grace and the spiritual

---

[30]Devine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today*, 99–104.

disciplines. Therefore, this thesis retrieves a lost but important theology and methodology of community.

This thesis will first explore Bonhoeffer's biography, showing his development as a theologian. It will then investigate the historical context of *LT*, beginning with the influence of Martin Luther on Germany and its church. It will then survey the background in which Bonhoeffer wrote *LT*. Next, this thesis will provide a summary of *LT*, analyzing the sources and biblical texts used by Bonhoeffer as he wrote. It will then outline themes inherent in *LT* as they were constructed in Bonhoeffer's early years. Finally, specific applications to be gleaned from *LT* for the contemporary church will be provided.

CHAPTER 2

A BIOGRAPHY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born on February 4, 1906, along with his twin sister Sabine. He was the sixth child born to his parents, Karl and Paula Bonhoeffer. At the time of his birth, the family lived in Breslau, Germany. His father Karl (1868–1948) was a highly regarded professor of psychiatry and neurology.[1] His mother, Paula (1874–1951), presided over the household with a staff of around five, who helped manage the home and assist in caring for the children. Paula educated the children in their early years in the home. Bonhoeffer's personality resembled his mother's, who enjoyed time with people unlike his father, who was something of an introvert.[2] He had great respect for his parents, which showed throughout his life as he remained closely connected to them.

Dietrich also had seven siblings with whom he was close: three brothers and four sisters. Karl Friedrich (1899–1957) was his oldest brother, who became a physicist. Walter (1899–1918) was the next oldest and was killed in the First World War. Klaus (1901–1945), his third brother, became a lawyer. Ursula (1902–1983) was his oldest sister. Christine (1903–1945) was his next oldest sister and she later married Hans von Dohnanyi (1902–1945). Sabine (1906–1999) was his twin sister; the two of them were extremely close. The youngest of the family was Susanne (1909–1991), who later married theologian Walter Dress (1904–1979).[3] Dietrich's place among his siblings changed over time as he became more interested in theology and later served in ministry.

---

[1]Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed., ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 3.

[2]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 16–18.

[3]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 18.

His siblings did not always share his religious views.

Bonhoeffer's path in life is surprising in light of the spiritual ethos of the family. They did not regularly attend church and were rarely involved in a local church at all. Instead of calling on a local parish minister, relatives who served in ministry were involved in any type of religious ceremony that was needed within the family. The Christian influence displayed within the family came from Bonhoeffer's mother. When she was younger, Paula spent time at Herrnhut, the birthplace of the Moravian Brethren Church. She retained some of the ideals she learned there, but much of her zeal waned as she grew older. Nevertheless, she taught the children using an illustrated Bible. That style of teaching so impacted Bonhoeffer that when he first began in ministry, he adopted the same style of biblical teaching. Paula's impact in the spiritual area of Bonhoeffer's life was significant. His father remained mostly uninvolved in the initiating of any such activity.[4]

University Studies

Bonhoeffer's decision to study theology and pursue a career as a theologian came at the young age of thirteen. This was not long after the death of his brother Walter in the First World War. Though his parents had hoped he would consider a career as a musician due to his talent and love for music, he remained steadfast in his desire to pursue theology. Music could not compare with the excitement he felt from studying theology, like when he read from one of the volumes on theology owned by his uncle Hans von Hase (1873–1958).[5] His siblings chided him about his decision to pursue a career in an institution like the church and Bonhoeffer replied, "In that case, I shall

---

[4]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 34–36.

[5]Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 16–17.

reform it!"[6] Bonhoeffer completed his primary schooling when he was seventeen in the spring of 1923.[7] Later that year, he prepared to begin his university studies and thus start his journey in theology.

Following in the footsteps of his father and brothers, Bonhoeffer enrolled in the University of Tübingen and began his studies there in the fall of 1923. His first semester consisted of primarily philosophy courses, which became a subject embedded in his later writing.[8] His first term at university passed quickly. After the beginning of a new year, just before his eighteenth birthday, Bonhoeffer hurt himself ice skating. It was at this time that he was preparing to spend the spring term in Rome with his brother Klaus who had just passed his bar examinations. Bonhoeffer's time in Rome through the summer of that year remained one of the most memorable times of his life.[9]

Rome fascinated him, partly because of the frequent trips many of his family members had taken there in years past. He was deeply interested in ancient Rome yet knew little about the modern city. This trip was a deeply memorable experience for Bonhoeffer. He rarely kept a diary through his life but did so during his time in Rome. He met a young priest from Bologna on his way there, with whom he conversed often during his stay about the things of the Roman Catholic Church. Being a Lutheran, though not previously highly devoted to his own church, he knew very little about this other church in Rome until this trip.[10] Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's close friend and biographer, commented on Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the Roman Catholic Church: "The devotion to the "church" that he encountered in Rome—the sense of the universality of the

---

[6]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 17.

[7]Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, trans. Isabel Best (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 16.

[8]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 18–19.

[9]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 56–57.

[10]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 56–58.

ecclesia—was something new to him."[11] What Bonhoeffer experienced in Rome began to shape his views on the church and faith, introducing elements that would be woven into his later writing.

Bonhoeffer returned home to Berlin from Rome and immediately immersed himself into the life of university studies. "His journey to Rome essentially helped him to articulate the theme of "the church."[12] He would begin to sort through this theme more in just a year after his return from Rome as he began his dissertation, which was remarkable for him to be writing at the young age of nineteen.[13] In the course of that year, he studied under well-known professors of the German theological world. Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) was a close neighbor of the Bonhoeffer's, one of the premier professors under whom Bonhoeffer studied and the director of the theological faculty at Berlin University.[14] Another of his professors, Karl Holl (1866–1926) was a renowned Luther scholar whom Charles Marsh claims shaped Bonhoeffer's view of Martin Luther more than anyone else under whom he studied.[15] A third professor was Reinhold Seeberg (1859–1935), who went on to supervise Bonhoeffer's dissertation, though his parents would have liked him to have studied under Holl.[16] These scholars impacted Bonhoeffer, but he soon began to chart his own path.

Towards the end of 1925 he began work on his dissertation, "Sanctorum Communio," which was a study of the sociology of the church. It was an interesting choice of study for someone who had not spent a great deal of time in a church up to that

---

[11]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 59.

[12]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 65.

[13]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 77.

[14]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 66.

[15]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 44.

[16]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 49–50.

point. Nevertheless, he was fascinated with the topic. He spent eighteen months writing, finishing it in the summer of 1927. Bonhoeffer had already become acquainted with the renowned theologian Karl Barth, whose work was sparking a movement of its own that ran counter to many of Bonhoeffer's professors. Bonhoeffer thought that his own approach in *SC* was a third way to approach the church distinguishing him from both Barth and his professors.[17] He borrowed and refashioned a concept from German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel, changing "God existing as community" to "Christ existing as church-community."[18] This hinted at the theological direction he increasingly took over the course of his life, namely that Christology was the theological center of the church.

Beginning Church Work

Interestingly enough, around the same time he began to write his dissertation, he began his first ministry work in a local church. It was required of candidates for theological examination to show proof of having worked in a local parish church. His task was to teach a children's Sunday school class, a work he continued for nearly three years. He spent a great deal of time preparing for his lessons with the children, drawing in some ways on how his mother had taught him when he was a child. The time he spent with the children grew into an additional group that he hosted at his parents' home for further discussion and teaching. This church work helped him see for the first time the struggle between his intellectual pursuits in theology and the practical everyday life of pastoral work.[19]

In November 1927 Bonhoeffer received a call from Max Diestel (1872–1949),

---

[17]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 81–83.

[18]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 83.

[19]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 91–94.

the superintendent who oversaw the needs of local parish churches. Diestel, who served as a mentor to Bonhoeffer, recommended him for a position in a church in Barcelona as an assistant vicar. Bonhoeffer was sure that he wanted to take the position as soon as he finished the conversation with Diestel. Bonhoeffer wrote to the pastor of the church in Barcelona, Fritz Olbricht, inquiring about the position.[20] "Olbricht replied that Bonhoeffer would have much time for his own work, he could play the piano and there was also an opera, and that even in Barcelona one needed winter clothing."[21] Bonhoeffer arrived in Barcelona much later than Olbricht would have liked. Olbricht was in desperate need of help and Bonhoeffer's tardiness in arriving, which was about three months later than Olbricht wanted, caused the cancellation of some services at the Barcelona church. Bonhoeffer finally arrived in Barcelona in mid-February 1928, after a week's vacation in Paris.[22]

The church in Barcelona ministered primarily to German expatriates. His primary responsibilities in the church were in the children's ministry and the high school youth group. In addition, he taught a few classes at the German school. He also had the opportunity to share in the pulpit ministry of the church. He saw fruit in the youth ministry, as the group grew from one to fifteen after a few weeks. Bonhoeffer also connected well with the adults of the congregation and was frequently invited into their homes and joined them in evenings out. However, it was in his time in the pulpit that he saw the greatest response to his ministry, one that rather unsettled Olbricht. People were attending and responding to Bonhoeffer's sermons in a greater proportion than to those of the tired pastor of the congregation.[23] "Bonhoeffer believed Olbricht had missed his true

---

[20]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 98–99.

[21]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 99.

[22]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 63–64.

[23]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 69–73.

calling, 'He would have been better suited as a forest ranger or an infantryman,' Dietrich told his mother."[24] Despite the friction between the two, Bonhoeffer felt that his time in Barcelona was altogether positive.

While in Barcelona Bonhoeffer took in the sights and sounds of the Spanish culture of the city. His brother Klaus came to visit him around Easter of that year and they travelled around together enjoying Spain and North Africa.[25] His work as a student however, did not come to an end while in Barcelona. He was invited in November 1928 to stay on as assistant pastor in Barcelona, but he declined. Bonhoeffer remained unsure at this point whether his long-term calling was in an academic setting or in the pastorate. He wanted to wait until he had completed his post-doctoral degree to make his final decision. However, the pastorate would require attending a preacher's seminary, which he saw as unneeded. Thus, he pursued the post-doctoral degree. Though he desired to write his dissertation under Seeberg's direction, he was unable to do so due to Seeberg's impending retirement. Wilhelm Lütgert (1867–1938), a New Testament and systematics scholar, instead became his supervisor.[26]

By the spring of 1929, Bonhoeffer returned to Berlin ready to begin work on his post-doctorate. In addition to this work, he took on the position of a voluntary assistant lecturer in the university seminar in systematic theology. It was under the tutelage and leadership of Lütgert that he fulfilled this duty. His postdoctoral thesis, "Act and Being," had its beginnings while he was in Barcelona as he considered what he might write about.[27] This project aimed at philosophers of his time as he entered into the debate raging between two different forms of knowledge, both of which he found deficient. It is

---

[24]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 75.

[25]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 102–3.

[26]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 120–21.

[27]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 129–32.

one of the more scholarly works written by Bonhoeffer.[28] The editor of the English edition of *Act and Being* (*AB*) explained the work as Bonhoeffer's effort to think about theology along with philosophy.[29] Bonhoeffer did this by beginning with Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), particularly his transcendentalism, and then analyzing the idealism that arose after Kant.[30] He also interacted with contemporaries such as Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), who argued that the best way to think about the concept of being was to do so from the perspective of a human being.[31] Bonhoeffer's interaction with Heidegger's ideas became a strand woven through much of the rest of his theological writing.[32] He completed and turned in the project in March 1930.[33]

In the summer of that year he completed his second church examination, which was part of his journey to the pastorate. Also, that summer he had the opportunity to eulogize one of his former mentors, Adolf von Harnack, who had unexpectedly died.[34] In September of the same year, he ended his time as voluntary assistant lecturer at the university and set sail for the United States for a yearlong study grant at Union Seminary in New York.[35]

In the United States

Before Bonhoeffer began his time under the Sloan Fellowship at Union Seminary, he spent five days visiting with relatives on his mother's side in Philadelphia.

---

[28]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 57–58.

[29]Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., introduction to *DBWE*, 2:12.

[30]Floyd, introduction to *DBWE*, 2:15.

[31]John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 348.

[32]Floyd, introduction to *DBWE*, 2:13–17.

[33]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 94.

[34]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 58–59.

[35]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 101–3.

His aunt and uncle met him at the New York City harbor after his nine days at sea. They treated him to trips around the city of Philadelphia and to lots of stories of their transition to life in the United States.[36] When this visit had come to an end and it was time to begin at Union, he found himself in the company of the two other Sloan Fellows with whom he became good friends: Erwin Sutz (1906–1987), who was from Switzerland, and Jean Lassere (1908–1983), who was from France. They became Bonhoeffer's European connection while in the United States.[37] Sutz was a student of Karl Barth and shared many theological commonalities with Bonhoeffer.[38] Lassere was the first pacifist minister that Bonhoeffer had ever met.[39] He remained in contact with both men after this time in the United States and both left lasting theological impressions on him.

Bonhoeffer also made few other important friends while in America. Frank Fisher (1908–1960) was a fellow student at Union, who also happened to be an African-American. Bonhoeffer was deeply interested in the African-American community and Fisher was his entrance into that world. The friendship became substantial enough that Bonhoeffer spent much of his extra time on Sundays and throughout the week at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. He not only worshipped there, but also taught a Sunday school class and helped in the youth ministry.[40] Bonhoeffer loved the fervor of the African-American services, but rightly saw the burdens of racism and injustice under which these brothers and sisters lived and worshipped.[41] Bonhoeffer's friendship with Fisher provided him with transformative experiences that would soon provide practical

---

[36]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 102.

[37]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 63.

[38]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 67.

[39]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 70.

[40]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 65.

[41]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 151.

lessons to apply in his own country. Bonhoeffer's other American friend was Paul Lehmann (1906–1994), who grew to know him more than any other classmate at Union. Lehmann had hoped for years after their first meeting, that Bonhoeffer would come back to the United States to become a professor.[42] But Bonhoeffer was never effectively tempted to make such a move.

Bonhoeffer was less than impressed by what he saw in the theological climate in America. He bemoaned the sentimentality amongst the intellectuals in the professed liberalism at Union. He was disappointed by the immaturity displayed in class discussions and the unwillingness to take study seriously. He was intrigued by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), one of the professors he studied with at Union. However, Bonhoeffer was willing to openly challenge Niebuhr's views, which were shaped by the Social Gospel movement. Niebuhr advocated a type of "Christian realism," which consistently tried to steer away from any type of transcendence in the Christian life. Bonhoeffer saw Niebuhr as lacking confessional vitality.[43] He saw the same pervasive problems not just at Union: "In New York, they preach about virtually everything; only one thing is not addressed, or addressed so rarely that I have as yet been unable to hear it, namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the cross, sin and forgiveness, death and life."[44] Needless to say, he was ready to make his way back home to Berlin once his time at Union was complete. He managed to fit in a trip to Cuba in the middle of his time in America around Christmas with Erwin Sutz.[45] He also went on a long trip at the end of the academic year with Sutz, Lassere, and Lehmann.[46] In 1931, he made his way back to

---

[42]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 64.

[43]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 104–8.

[44]*DBWE*, 10:313.

[45]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 69.

[46]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 72.

Germany in the middle of the year to begin a chapter in his life he could not have seen coming.

New Careers

Bonhoeffer was not home long from the United States when he was again traveling. This time, he was on his way to Bonn to have his first visit with Karl Barth. Erwin Sutz had arranged the meeting while Bonhoeffer was still in the United States.[47] This meeting began a relationship that continued until Bonhoeffer's death. His time with Barth did not last long and soon he was back in Berlin to begin three new careers. He took on the role as an assistant lecturer at the University of Berlin, which paid a meager salary.[48] He also began official ecumenical work having received an invitation to the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship Through the Churches.[49] His third career was as chaplain to students at the Berlin Technical University.[50] Bethge summed up this time for Bonhoeffer well amidst all the change he experienced and the environs in which he found himself: "He now began to teach on a faculty whose theology he did not share, and to preach in a church whose self-confidence he regarded as unfounded. More aware than before, he now became part of a society that was moving toward political, social, and economic chaos."[51] The preaching he did was during his work as a chaplain, but officially after his ordination to the ministry in November 1931.[52]

In February 1932, Bonhoeffer moved out of his family's home to another part of town, northeast Berlin, which put him in another district of service in the church.

---

[47]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 76–77.

[48]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 97.

[49]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 140.

[50]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 144.

[51]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 173.

[52]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 146.

When his chaplaincy was over around the same time, he requested the post of pastoral assistant at Zionskirche, around the corner from his house.[53] He described this part of town in a letter to Erwin Sutz: "[It] is about the toughest neighborhood of Berlin, with the most difficult socioeconomic and political conditions."[54] This was right where Bonhoeffer wanted to be, despite its differences from the type of area he was used to residing in with his parents. His task was among the youth of the congregation, specifically getting young, rowdy boys to their confirmation. He also regularly met with the families of his confirmands. He grew close to those under his pastoral care, inviting them to his house for Bible study and to listen to records of African-American spirituals he brought home from the United States.[55]

Changes for Bonhoeffer and 1933

Bethge pointed out that several shifts began to happen in Bonhoeffer during this season of his life. The first was theological. He began to move away from the technicalities embodied in his dissertation and postdoctoral thesis and toward theology developed from his own words. It was a time of evident fruit-bearing. Christology was becoming central to his theological thinking. This season started to lay the foundation for what would become *CD* and *LT*. The second shift he experienced focused on his personal faith and his view of the Bible.[56] This transformation is best described in Bonhoeffer's own words, which he wrote to Elisabeth Zinn (1908–1995) years later:

> I threw myself into my work in an extremely un-Christian and not at all humble fashion. A rather crazy element of ambition, which some people noticed in me, made my life difficult and withdrew from me the love and trust of those around me. At that time, I was terribly alone and left to myself. It was quite bad. But then something different came, something that has changed and transformed my life to

---

[53]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 147.

[54]*DBWE*, 11:76.

[55]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 147–48.

[56]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 174.

> this very day. For the first time, I came to the Bible. That, too, is an awful thing to say. I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the church, had spoken and written about it—and yet I was not yet a Christian but rather in an utterly wild and uncontrolled fashion my own master. I do know that at the time I turned the cause of Jesus Christ into an advantage for myself, for my crazy vanity. I pray to God that will never happen again. Nor had I ever prayed, or had done so only very rarely. Despite this isolation, I was quite happy with myself. The Bible, especially the Sermon on the Mount, freed me from all this. Since then everything has changed. I have felt this plainly and so have other people around me. That was a great liberation. It became clear to me that the life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the church, and step-by-step it became clearer to me how far it must go.[57]

Bonhoeffer had undergone a transformation and it was apparent in his ministry work as well as in his writing. In the winter semester that began at the end of 1932, Bonhoeffer gave a series of lectures on the first three chapters of the book of Genesis, which would later be published as *Creation and Fall*. Bonhoeffer considered the work a "theological exposition" of the Genesis account of creation and the fall of mankind. The book was coincidentally the first book by Bonhoeffer that Barth later read.[58] Charles Marsh commented that *Creation and Fall* contained Bonhoeffer's effort to let the Bible speak to and against the environment brewing around him.[59] This environment came to a head as Bonhoeffer finished that winter semester in 1933, when German societal stability began to unravel.

While Bonhoeffer was charting his course, the year of 1933 became a redirecting force in his life and ministry. The reach of that year's impact went beyond just Bonhoeffer's own life, but Germany and all of the world changed. Bonhoeffer could not have escaped it. Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) took over the leadership of the government in January 1933.[60] That changed everything. As Germany was swept up into the mesmerizing power of the *Führer*, many of the churches and seminary faculties were influenced by the rhetoric as well. The notion of the *Führer* principle dictated that

---

[57]*DBWE*, 14:134.

[58]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 215–17.

[59]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 156.

[60]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 257.

political authority in the government came from the top down through all lower levels of life. The top, from which all authority flowed, was the *Führer*. This changed not only political life, but every aspect of German society and with it, the churches.[61]

In February, Bonhoeffer was invited to give an address on the radio. It was entitled, "The Younger Generation's Altered View of the Concept of *Führer*." During the live broadcast while he was reading through his transcript, someone at the radio station switched off his microphone and the rest of his address was not heard on the radio. He had the transcript printed and circulated afterwards.[62] He also later gave the address at the Technical University and at the College of Political Science.[63] Bonhoeffer saw the dangers of what was taking place and he was no longer able to be politically passive. From this time on, Bonhoeffer referred to Hitler as the Antichrist.[64] In March, the Enabling Act was passed, which gave Hitler and his cabinet the power to enact laws without the involvement of the Reichstag. This step along with the Malicious Practices Acts passed after the Reichstag fire in late February, brought about total Nazi control. The same week the Enabling Act was passed, the first concentration camp in Dachau was opened.[65] Evil was spreading throughout Germany.

In April, the Aryan paragraph was passed by the Reichstag, which removed all Jews from civil service, which included churches, both Catholic and Protestant. German Christians were largely complicit in the order, which gave Hitler the ability to establish one unified Reich Church. In order to keep his will maintained in the churches, Hitler appointed Ludwig Müller (1883–1945) as special representative to the churches. This

---

[61]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 158–59.

[62]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 117.

[63]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 159.

[64]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 160.

[65]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 161.

gave way to his being made Reich Bishop by July, winning more than seventy percent of the vote. Also voted in and approved that July by the Reich Church was the Aryan paragraph.[66]

Bonhoeffer was driven to action. He wrote an essay titled "The Church and the Jewish Question," which was published in a Protestant magazine for culture and politics. Ferdinand Schlingensiepen commented on the apparent struggle Bonhoeffer had at the time to go against the Lutheran understanding that the state had the responsibility to uphold law and order in the world. In some ways, the church had no context for how to speak theologically against the state. However, as Schlingensiepen pointed out, in this essay Bonhoeffer was beginning to formulate a way forward. The state had encroached on the church with the Aryan paragraph, thus the church needed to know how to respond.[67]

With the implementation of the Reich Church and Müller as Reich Bishop, the struggle for the church in Germany was underway. A movement called the Young Reformation Movement for the Renewal of the Church sprang up as an attempt to correct what was happening in the church at the hands of the Nazi government. However, the Young Reformation movement was not so much against the Nazi government, but rather against the state's encroachment into the church. German Christians were allowing the state to interfere, and the Young Reformation sought to correct that. The result of their efforts was the start of the German Evangelical Church. This effort ultimately failed as Müller became the Reich Bishop and the German Evangelical Church fell under his control as well in the July elections.[68]

Bonhoeffer spoke at a Young Reformation meeting in June pushing hard

---

[66]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 162–63.

[67]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 125–27.

[68]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 127–34.

against the Aryan paragraph and what the church must do in response. He did not receive a great hearing from those in attendance. However, a few there appreciated Bonhoeffer's zeal and vision for the future of the church in relation to these issues.[69] The failure of the German Evangelical Church solidified in the elections in July brought about a new direction for those that thought like Bonhoeffer. In August, groups of pastors gathered in Westphalia at a hospital called Bethel to begin drafting what would be called the Bethel Confession. It was intended to push against the false doctrine of the German Christians. Though Bonhoeffer was involved with the Bethel Confession, he was not entirely happy with the end result. However, his time working on the confession provided meetings with other pastors. The Pastors' Emergency League was started in September in response to the Reich Church synod. This group was made up of many pastors that participated in the Bethel Confession. The Confessing Church was thus born, having its governing council democratically elected in October, which was a first among German Protestant Churches.[70] Nevertheless, the Confessing Church was not perfect.

Bonhoeffer's work to keep the disapproval of the Aryan paragraph and the general beliefs of the Nazi party out of the Confessing Church met formidable criticism. Paul Althaus (1888–1966), a professor at the University of Göttingen, had joined the ranks of dissenting pastors only to eventually begin singing the praises of the Nazi movement from within the Confessing Church. Subsequently, the final version of the Bethel Confession had any and all criticism of the Aryan paragraph removed. Bonhoeffer was devastated.[71] Bonhoeffer decided to take leave of the situation and accept a pastorate in London. "Thus Bonhoeffer left Berlin partly because of doubts about the course he should take and partly to keep his thoughts and actions from being constricted into a

---

[69]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 176.

[70]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 134–38.

[71]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 190–91.

narrow ecclesiastical dimension. What he wanted was a period of seeking and testing in a small, quiet congregation."[72] Bonhoeffer wrote to Friedrich Singer (1873–1934), the pastor he would be replacing in London, that he would be arriving on October 17.[73] Thus he began a near two-year period of physical disconnect from the Church struggle in Germany.

London

Aside from a distracting infestation of mice in his London house and frequent colds and fevers in his first several months there, Bonhoeffer spent much of his time devoted to ministry.[74] He was in charge of two of the six German congregations in London. This was the first time that he had to deliver a sermon every Sunday, which he found difficult. Bethge commented that the church struggle in Germany was largely absent from his preaching. He instead focused heavily on stirring up a longing for the kingdom of heaven amongst his people.[75]

He continued on wrestling with what to do about the church struggle in different ways since he was removed from his country. One of the most important developments for Bonhoeffer at this time was meeting the Bishop of Chichester, George Bell (1883–1958). This meeting began a longstanding friendship that lasted until Bonhoeffer's death. He considered Bell a close friend throughout the church struggle and later was Bell's German informant.[76] Bell proved to be a helpful sounding board for Bonhoeffer as he sorted through the events going on in his homeland. Things in Germany had progressed to a point where a break with the Reich Church was finally plausible. In

---

[72]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 327.

[73]*DBWE*, 12:184.

[74]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 145.

[75]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 329–31.

[76]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 205.

May 1934, delegates gathered in the city of Barmen-Wuppertal to form the Confessing Synod of Barmen. There a document was drafted that sealed the Confessing Church's break from any German Christian or German Evangelical Church influence. Bonhoeffer did not attend, but he signed the declaration.[77] Schlingensiepen noted that though Bonhoeffer did not attend, he considered the Barmen Declaration to be one of the most important events in his life. It was essentially the reason behind his return to Germany in 1935.[78]

Finkenwalde

When Bonhoeffer left London, he would say openly that he was headed back to Germany to become the director of a Confessing Church preachers' seminary in Düsseldorf. However, there was no Confessing Church preachers' seminary in Düsseldorf. The location was changed in his public mentions to throw off the Gestapo, since the Confessing Church seminaries were illegal. The actual location of the seminary was in the village of Zingst, in the province of Pomerania near the Baltic Sea. They met in the youth holiday camp owned by the Westphalian School Bible Club for the first two months. [79] They soon found a house in the small country town of Finkenwalde for the seminary's more permanent location.[80] The house needed some refurbishing, which was finished in June 1935. The first official session began in August. Bonhoeffer structured the days for the students in a monastic style, following a schedule that incorporated individual and corporate spiritual disciplines.[81] The seminary continued through the end of 1937 when it was shut down under a decree issued by Heinrich Himmler (1900–

---

[77]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 223.

[78]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 163.

[79]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 177.

[80]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 425.

[81]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 231–34.

1945).[82] One of the seminary students was Eberhard Bethge (1909–2000), who became Bonhoeffer's closest friend and eventual biographer. In July 1936, as Confessing Church pastors began to be arrested under laws making it illegal to associate with non-Nazi churches and organizations, even Bonhoeffer's students at Finkenwalde were targeted.[83] The oppressive assault brought on by the Nazis against dissenters like those in the Confessing Church drove Bonhoeffer to be creative about how he would continue to educate pastors.

During his time at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer worked on two writing projects that have become his most well-known classics. *CD* came from lectures he delivered at the seminary and it was largely the culmination of the things stirring in Bonhoeffer for some time. He finished the book shortly before the Gestapo shut down the seminary at Finkenwalde. The finalized copies of *CD* were completed during Advent 1937 and some of the first were sent by Bonhoeffer to his former Finkenwalde students.[84] Additionally, the beginning stages of *LT* were delivered as lectures at the seminary. Not only were lectures given regarding this content, but the students essentially lived *LT* during their time at Finkenwalde.[85]

Bonhoeffer was able to keep the spirit of Finkenwalde going in limited ways. He began to manage two seminaries, one in Köslin and one in Schlawe, which were both in east Pomerania. Both seminaries existed in houses, similar to the Finkenwalde seminary. Things were much more primitive and occasionally locations had to be changed.[86] Yet, the training of dissenting pastors was able to continue for a time.

---

[82]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 260.

[83]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 247.

[84]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 451.

[85]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 462–63.

[86]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 210–11.

Regretfully, the Confessing Church was crumbling under the pressure it faced. Orders were given in early 1938 that all Protestant pastors had to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler on his birthday. Later that year, despite efforts by Bonhoeffer and others to the contrary, many of the Confessing Church pastors swore the oath.[87] The trajectory of the Confessing Church led Bonhoeffer to consider another path he needed to take in obedience to God in relation to the church struggle in Germany.

Towards the End

Hans von Dohnanyi, Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, had been trying to bring him into efforts to fight against the Nazi government from within. Dohnanyi worked for the Reich Minister of Justice Franz Gürtner (1881–1941) and was able to maintain an anti-Nazi stance throughout his time in the government under Gürtner.[88] In February 1938, Bonhoeffer's brother Klaus and Hans von Dohnanyi introduced Bonhoeffer to members of a conspiracy within a section of the *Abwehr*, German military intelligence.[89] This meeting set in motion eventual involvement for Bonhoeffer that would lead to his imprisonment and death.

Bonhoeffer continued with his work in the even more secretive seminaries until in June 1939 he decided to take a trip back to the United States. The trip resulted from the work of Bonhoeffer's friend Paul Lehmann, whom he had met in his first trip to the United States. Lehmann had become a professor at Union and he worked with Reinhold Niebuhr to get Bonhoeffer to the United States. The Nazis had already carried out the atrocities of *Kristallnacht*, murdering and arresting thousands of Jews. Bonhoeffer was planning to refuse the upcoming draft to the military, which Niebuhr knew would

---

[87]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 212–13.

[88]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 623–24.

[89]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 267.

mean death for him. Therefore, Bonhoeffer was brought to the United States through the German refugee program as both an itinerant preacher, and a visiting professor. This visit to the United States did not conjure up the same positive feelings that his first trip had.[90] Nearly as soon as he arrived he began to struggle with why he was even there.

In a letter to Paul Lehmann in late June, he explained that he would be going back to Germany in August or even late July: "I am enjoying a few weeks in freedom, but on the other hand, I feel, I must go back to the "trenches" (I mean the Church-struggle)."[91] Marsh explained that his time in the United States for those six weeks forged a new resolve in Bonhoeffer.[92] He was ready to go home and act. By the autumn of 1940, he had made up his mind to join the resistance.[93] His official acceptance into the *Abwehr* took time. Meanwhile, he was under investigation by the Reich Central Security Office for his preaching and teaching.[94] Despite these investigations and all of his efforts in the Confessing Church, he was finally accepted in to the *Abwehr* in October 1940 exempting him from military service.[95] His life became even more complex.

Despite being accepted by the *Abwehr*, he was still under suspicion for actions subverting the people. He was declined acceptance into the Reich Writer's Guild in November 1940, which effectively kept him from public writing.[96] However, this did not keep him from actually writing. During the winter of 1940 through 1941, he spent three months in the village of Ettal across the street from the Benedictine monastery and in the monastery, itself. While there, he began work on his final major work, *Ethics*, which he

---

[90]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 275–77.

[91]*DBWE*, 15:206.

[92]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 285.

[93]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 289.

[94]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 288.

[95]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 307.

[96]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 262.

was not able to completely finish. At the monastery he was able to discuss *CD* and *LT,* both of which were now published, because the monks read aloud from both during mealtimes.[97] Outside of his time at the monastery, this period of his life was multi-faceted. He carried on as a pastor. He stayed in contact with Confessing Church pastors and their families. He operated essentially as a double agent within the *Abwehr*. Additionally, he stayed in contact with his ecumenical contacts.[98]

The complex life Bonhoeffer lived during these years was hard for some to understand, specifically those with whom he could not share all the details. Barth grew suspicious of Bonhoeffer when he heard of his involvement with the *Abwehr*, which changed their relationship. Others had the same concerns, but it seems that Bonhoeffer was unaware of the impressions he was leaving.[99] However, he had positive aspects of his life at the time. He had developed a relationship with Maria von Wedemeyer (1924–1977). The relationship brought him great joy; it was a joy that he had been without thus far in his life. The two were engaged in January 1943. Wedemeyer informed Bonhoeffer of her decision by letter.[100] However, the serious nature of his involvement in conspiracy came to a head when he was arrested along with Hans von Dohnanyi on April 5, 1943.[101]

Bonhoeffer was first put in Tegel military prison in Berlin. He was able to have visitors at Tegel, frequently seeing Maria and his parents. However, as things worsened, he lost his privileges.[102] He remained at Tegel through October 1944. He was moved to the cellar prison of the Reich SS Headquarters. An attempt on Hitler's life in July caused

---

[97]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 296–97.

[98]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 247–48.

[99]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 327.

[100]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 309–10.

[101]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 314.

[102]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 314.

tensions to rise.[103] In February 1945, Bonhoeffer was transferred to Flossenbürg concentration camp in Buchenwald.[104] Two months later, Bonhoeffer, along with five other prisoners "were forced to undress and were led naked down the short steps from the detention barracks to the gallows that had been erected against a high brick wall."[105] Earlier that day, he led the other prisoners in a worship service. "So Bonhoeffer read the Bible texts for that day, 'With his stripes we are healed' (Isaiah 53:5) and 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Peter 1:3)."[106] Hitler himself seems to have made the decision for both Bonhoeffer and Hans von Dohnanyi to be executed on April 5.[107]

Bonhoeffer left the majority of his belongings to Bethge, including his writings. Bethge was instrumental in getting *Letters and Papers From Prison* published as well as *Ethics*. Bethge was also the one who confirmed the news about the prisoners' deaths and communicated it to their families after his release from prison in late April.[108] A memorial service was held on July 27, 1945 for Bonhoeffer, led in part by Bishop George Bell in Holy Trinity Church, Kingsway, London. In his sermon, Bell called Bonhoeffer a martyr.[109] Bonhoeffer was immortalized in a statue carved on the west portal of Westminster Abbey, where he stands holding an open Bible.[110] His life and writings remind the church of the devotion and courage needed in following Jesus Christ.

---

[103]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 360.

[104]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 388.

[105]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 390.

[106]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 377.

[107]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 924.

[108]Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 393–94.

[109]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 930–31.

[110]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 379.

CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF *LIFE TOGETHER*

It is hard to imagine that the foundations for a book like *LT* can be traced back to a short treatise by Martin Luther entitled *On Secular Authority: To What Extent We Owe It Obedience* written in 1523. Nevertheless, this short treatise paints the backdrop for the underground seminary ran by Bonhoeffer in Finkenwalde. Luther and his writings had a profound impact on Germany beginning with the events of the Reformation and beyond. Richard Pierard argued that this treatise is the foundational Luther text to which Lutherans look in order to build their doctrine of the two kingdoms.[1] Michael DeJonge, in his recent work, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther*, agrees that this text is the clearest description of Luther's own account of the two kingdoms.[2] It was originally a sermon delivered in 1522. However, on New Year's Day the following year Luther sent it as a treatise to the Duke of Saxony, John the Steadfast (1468–1532).[3] In it he argued that "God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that—no thanks to them—they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace."[4] Pierard argued that Luther's followers have interpreted his

---

[1]Richard V. Pierard, "The Lutheran Two-Kingdoms Doctrine and Subservience to the State in Modern Germany," *JETS* 29, no. 2 (June 1986): 193.

[2]Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 84.

[3]Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed., ed. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 428–29.

[4]Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 433.

views in order to develop the two-kingdoms doctrine.[5] The terminology used to define this doctrine was not settled as such until the 1930s. It is commonly thought that Karl Barth first used the term in a debate in 1922.[6] The two-kingdoms doctrine not only impacted the Lutheran church, but Germany itself since the Lutheran Church became so imbedded into the fabric of the country's culture.

By the time World War I ended, Pierard explained that the prevailing conception of the two kingdoms had developed into a firm belief in the separation of the sacred and the secular. Pierard references supporters of this developed doctrine such as Karl Holl, who served as one of Bonhoeffer's professors and was a renowned Luther scholar.[7] Therefore, a clear thread of interpretation of Luther's views spans all the way to Bonhoeffer's time. This doctrine presented a vacuum in Germany into which the Nazi party walked, nearly uncontested. After all, Luther said,

> Because the sword is most beneficial and necessary for the whole world in order to preserve peace, punish sin, and restrain the wicked, the Christian submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays his taxes, honors those in authority, serves, helps, and does all he can to assist the governing authority, that it may continue to function and be held in honor and fear.[8]

Germans were convinced and thus compelled to respect and follow the rule of the state, trusting that it was put in place by God to rightly govern. Victoria Barnett explained: "Christians owed political obedience to the throne and religious subservience to the altar. German Protestants viewed their love for the Fatherland and loyalty to its leaders as patriotic and Christian virtues."[9] An additional contributing factor to this close tie of nationalism and the Church was the system of patronage that had developed after the

---

[5]Pierard, "Lutheran Two-Kingdoms Doctrine," 193–94.

[6]DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther*, 95.

[7]Pierard, "Lutheran Two-Kingdoms Doctrine," 197–98.

[8]Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 435.

[9]Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 11.

Reformation. Soon after the initial events of the Reformation, churches that were no longer under the rule of Roman Catholic bishops came under the protection of the prince of their province. This gave princes, whether pious or not, control over churches and their pastors, because they controlled the money and most likely had built the church building.[10] This longstanding practice would have created dependencies and an established norm as to how churches interacted with and were in service to the government. Therefore, this was the door through which the Nazi party would walk to gain control of nearly every aspect of life in Germany.

In a way that Luther likely would not have intended, particular strands of the two-kingdoms doctrine in the early twentieth century began to stray from its roots. As various academics with a more sociological bent started to manipulate and work with the two-kingdoms doctrine, what surfaced was a type of dualism. In other words, the divide between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man grew. Some like Ludwig Ihmels (1858–1933), Paul Althaus (1888–1966), and Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) argued for increasing autonomy in the worldly side of life.[11] Thus, a direct line between Luther and what became the prevailing view on the two kingdoms cannot be clearly drawn, but it is clear that Luther's views were reinterpreted and manipulated to present the opportunity for Nazi ideology to spread.

Thankfully, when the Nazi party began to exert its influence there were enough Christians in Germany that had also read Luther's cautions to Christians about the state:

> If your prince or temporal ruler commands you to side with the pope, to believe thus and so, or to get rid of certain books, you should say, "It is not fitting that Lucifer should sit at the side of God. Gracious sir, I owe you obedience in the body and property; command me within the limits of your authority on earth, and I will obey. But if you command me to believe or to get rid of certain books, I will not obey; for then you are a tyrant and overreach yourself, commanding where you have neither

---

[10]Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 11.

[11]DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther*, 96–97.

the right nor the authority," etc.[12]

Luther had already argued that the state had no authority over the soul of an individual, which was a truth that many in Germany seemed to embrace.[13] It is from this truth that *LT* ultimately springs.

Several English interpreters of Bonhoeffer do not see him taking up Luther's mantle of two kingdoms throughout his lifetime. They have argued that he may have espoused it early in his career, but later dropped it. However, Michael DeJonge argued that Bonhoeffer was indeed influenced by this doctrine and it was prevalent throughout his life.[14] Despite the developments in the two-kingdoms doctrine made by some of Bonhoeffer's contemporaries resulting in increased autonomy, Bonhoeffer stood in opposition to such changes.[15] Bonhoeffer stated, "God's word has power also over the state."[16] He pushed even further against any notion of dualism: "Obedience to the state exists only when the state does not threaten the word."[17] Therefore, Bonhoeffer stood in solidarity with Luther. That stance would lead him to Finkenwalde.

Bonhoeffer, being a younger man at the time, lived in a country riddled by several coalescing circumstances. Andrew Root aptly described how Germany was in the midst of various youth movements, which thrived during Bonhoeffer's life. One such movement was called *Wondervogel*, which was a bohemian-like movement bent on protesting the middle-class sensibilities of Germany.[18] The follow-up to this movement was called *Bunde*, which shared many of the same impulses of *Wondervogel*, yet also

---

[12]Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 445.

[13]Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 441.

[14]DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther*, 77–78.

[15]DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther*, 104.

[16]*DBWE*, 11:332.

[17]*DBWE*, 11:332.

[18]Andrew Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 23.

spread its influence into other spheres of society such as church groups and the Boy Scouts, of which Bonhoeffer was a part.[19] This is the context in which Bonhoeffer ministered. Root explained,

> Yet like so much else in Germany, the German youth movement would have its demise in the Third Reich. The Nazis had a way of either strangling things dead or enveloping them into their own agenda. The youth movement met not so much a violent end as a co-opted one. The Hitler Youth would become the Third Reich's own youth movement that, along with the churches, was taken into the National Socialist agenda once the Nazis were in power. The Hitler Youth was the Nazi strategy of possessing for itself the energy and attention youth received in Germany at this time. Yet, uniquely, the Nazis were able to turn the middle-class youth movement's nonpolitical concerns uber-political, by co-opting and using working-class animosity.[20]

In addition to the two-kingdoms mentality prevalent in Germany, going after this pre-existing youth angst was how the corruption of Nazi ideology crept its way into the country and the church.

1933

Though the Nazi party had been working to come to power and influence in years prior, 1933 was the year their work began to bear fruit. Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany on January 30 of that year. The Nazis had gained so much support and power among conservatives in Germany that Reich President Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934) was forced to appoint Hitler as Chancellor. Ian Kershaw argued that the Nazis had purposefully positioned things as they were in order to force Hindenburg's hand.[21] The Enabling Act was passed on March 23, giving Hitler and his cabinet power to circumvent the Reichstag. All other political parties besides the Nazi party were considered illegal on June 14.[22] Hitler's stranglehold on the country grew tighter as the

---

[19]Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 25–26.

[20]Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 27.

[21]Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914–1949* (New York: Viking, 2015), 213–14.

[22]Kershaw, *To Hell and Back*, 214–15.

year went on.

Soon after his assumption of the role of Chancellor, Hitler began his campaign of *Gleichschaltung* "(literally, "switching into the same gear") of German society."[23] Hitler was essentially fighting for the same kind of devotion and passion for the nation and its imminent thousand-year Third Reich as Christians would have for their faith in Christ.[24] A year before this, the German Christian movement began in May 1932.[25] The German Christians absorbed some of the rhetoric inherent in Hitler's vision for a mighty German Reich.[26] In view of Germany's historic blend of nationalism and Christian faith, it is not hard to fathom such a group as the German Christians existing. Larry Rasmussen pointed out,

> In the very early months of National Socialism, the party even encouraged Germans to rejoin the church (they did), and Hitler seemed to offer a pseudo-religious and populist, even mystical, transformation of politics itself. Clergy and laity in turn reciprocated with enthusiasm for what they regarded as the opportunity to re-evangelize the nation and rejuvenate the church. Then, with the burning of the strongest symbol of the German state, the Reichstag, on February 27, 1933, Hitler had the terrorist act he needed to move swiftly from a faltering democracy toward party control and dictatorship (some historians believe the Nazi party itself was behind the fire).[27]

The tainting of Christianity with populist political agendas was the mire from which the German Christian movement arose. Their stance on confessional issues and their very existence sparked much of the resulting opposition that arose in the German Protestant church thereafter.

By July 1933, Hitler's man of choice, Ludwig Müller, was put in power over the Reich Church. Friedrich von Bodelschwingh (1877–1946) was originally put in

---

[23]Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 30.

[24]Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 32.

[25]Michael B. Lukens, Victoria J. Barnett, and Mark S. Brocker, introduction to *DBWE,* 11:2.

[26]Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 32.

[27]Larry L. Rasmussen, introduction to *DBWE,* 12:11.

charge as Bishop, but the July elections were swayed in favor of the German Christian movement. There was no surprise as to the German Christian choice for Reich Bishop; it was Müller.[28] The church structure that became assumed as the Reich Church was at first the German Evangelical Church. There had been a growing desire to unify the existing twenty-eight regional Protestant churches.[29] "But this desire was highly susceptible to co-optation by nationalist political ambitions and the German Christian agenda in particular."[30] Regrettably, this is exactly what happened.

On July 11, a constitution for the German Evangelical Church was accepted by the government. The problems that this created between the Germans Christians and those in disagreement with them revolved around the theological confession the church would be based on and what the leadership of the church would look like.[31] As a direct effort to answer the theological concern, the Young Reformation movement suggested that a suitable confession be drafted. After the German Christians won the elections in late July, Bodelschwingh was encouraged to include Bonhoeffer and other pastors in the effort to draft the confession. The group met in Bethel and wrote the confession throughout the month of August. Work on the Bethel Confession lasted into the autumn of that year with editorial meetings. Bonhoeffer took his pastorate in London in October and the work on the confession continued.[32]

Bonhoeffer was ultimately not happy with the finished version of the confession, especially since he was in London and unable to be as closely involved with

---

[28]Keith Clements, introduction to *DBWE,* 13:5.

[29]Clements, introduction to *DBWE,* 13:4.

[30]Clements, introduction to *DBWE,* 13:4.

[31]Clements, introduction to *DBWE,* 13:5.

[32]Carsten Nicolaisen, "Concerning the History of the Bethel Confession," trans. Douglas W. Scott, in *DBWE,* 12:509–10.

the writing.[33] Bonhoeffer outlined the specific problems he saw in the final version of the Bethel Confession in a talk he gave at a pastors' conference in Bradford, Yorkshire, England in November 1933. The primary issues were with key theological points like justification, the cross, and the Holy Spirit.[34] Bonhoeffer felt that Bodelschwingh had acted to dilute the confession and keep it from having the kind of impact it could or should have had.[35] The notes from Bonhoeffer's comments about the revised version of the confession stated that "it is now being published, after having the (original) intent spoiled by a few pastors."[36] The intent of the first version of the Bethel Confession was largely directed by Bonhoeffer himself with the help of George Merz (1892–1959).[37] On justification and the cross, the original confession stated, "the church teaches that godless humankind can find its way to a merciful God only through faith in Jesus Christ, who was crucified and resurrected as intermediary for us."[38] On the Holy Spirit the original confession stated,

> The church teaches that the Holy Spirit, true God for all eternity, is not created, not made, but proceeds from the Father and the Son; that the Spirit is given to humankind only through the external Word and the sacraments of the church; that through the Spirit those persons are drawn from all nations whom God has chosen, who will belong to Christ's church; that the Spirit teaches, judges, punishes, and creates faith, conversion, and renewal in human beings.[39]

The early version of the Bethel Confession represented biblical Christianity, which shows not only the reason for Bonhoeffer's frustration with the changes made to the document, but also Bonhoeffer's own orthodoxy in wanting such confessional truths to stay intact in

---

[33]Nicolaisen, "Concerning the History of the Bethel Confession," in *DBWE,* 12:512–13.

[34]*DBWE,* 13:47–49.

[35]Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed., ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 303.

[36]*DBWE*, 13:47.

[37]Nicolaisen, "Concerning the History of the Bethel Confession," in *DBWE,* 12:510.

[38]*DBWE*, 12:400.

[39]*DBWE*, 12:399.

the Confessing Church. However, Bonhoeffer's exit from the project in taking up the pastorate in London kept him from continuing to have the kind of influence he had in its beginning.

In September 1933, the church in the Old Prussian Union held their synod and it was overrun by the German Christians. In fact, it was referred to as the brown synod, because so many showed up wearing brown SA uniforms.[40] A notable result of the synod was a vote to only allow Nazi party members and sympathizers as well as those who were only of Aryan descent to be allowed to serve in the church. This was referred to as the Aryan Clause or Paragraph. This led to the creation of the Pastors' Emergency League, which basically replaced the Young Reformation movement. The League grew quickly to nearly six thousand pastors.[41] The League was founded by Martin Niemöller (1892–1984), who served as pastor of the Dahlem church in Berlin. Niemöller arose as the primary leader of the opposition against the German Christian movement.[42]

Towards the end of September 1933, Niemöller sent a flyer on behalf of the Pastor's Emergency League to the National Synod, which represented the German Evangelical Church. The flyer stated in part, "The National Synod must not give the impression, through its solemn character, that it represents a united church, as long as our congregations are torn apart by the deepest conflicts."[43] The flyer pointed to the existence of dissenting voices amongst the German Evangelical Church, though it was supposed to be a cohesive body. As with most everything the Nazi-ran government did, the German Evangelical Church was less an attempt at actually unity and simply a well-dressed ploy of *Gleichschaltung*. Bonhoeffer was among those that drafted the statement printed on

---

[40]Clements, introduction to *DBWE,* 13:5.

[41]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 309–311.

[42]Clements, introduction to *DBWE,* 13:5–6.

[43]*DBWE*, 12:181.

the flyer and his name is clearly listed among the rest of the pastors involved.[44] The dissenting voices in what was becoming the church struggle were multiplying and the next major chapter would take place the following May.

Barmen

Tensions rose in the church during the winter of late 1933 and early 1934. Klaus Scholder explained that the Confessing Church was officially born in the spring of 1934. Representatives of the various Confessing churches gathered in Ulm, Württemberg, to draft a declaration setting in motion their stance of division from the German Christian influenced church. This was later described as the Ulm Declaration.[45] Scholder declared, "This was no longer just the voice of the church opposition, a church group in competition with another group, the German Christians, for the government of the church, but that of the 'legitimate Evangelical Church of Germany."[46] Plans were then made to constitute a free synod that would give the chance for this Confessing Church to meet in solidarity. That synod met on May 29, 1934.[47] The meeting, spanning three days in Barmen, in the city of Wuppertal, was to formulate a theological declaration for the Confessing Church.[48] Ferdinand Schlingensiepen stated, "the Synod declared its loyalty to the fundamental teachings of Martin Luther, with his threefold 'solus': *solus Christus, sola scriptura and sola fide*."[49] Eberhard Bethge added, "here all the teachings of the German Christians were condemned as heretical. With that the threat of separation from

---

[44]*DBWE,* 12:181.

[45]Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, vol. 2, *The Year of Disillusionment: 1934 Barmen and Rome*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 84–85.

[46]Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 2:85.

[47]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 366–67.

[48]Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*, trans. Isabel Best (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 161.

[49]Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945*, 162.

the German Evangelical Church became imminent."[50] Barmen became the theological rallying cry for the Confessing Church in Germany.[51]

Barmen sparked many things, but one the most significant for Bonhoeffer was the creation of the Confessing Church seminaries. In March 1934, the Old Prussian preachers' seminaries were shut down as Nazi ideology infiltrated. Therefore, those aligned with the Confessing Church had to have some means of ordination founded in Confessing Church beliefs and practices. They increasingly could not rely on anything related to the Reich Church. At the beginning of the summer of that same year, Bonhoeffer was approached to be a part of these seminaries. The decision hung in the balance for him for quite some time and it would be nearly a year until he would begin work in one of these seminaries.[52] As things were approaching the destiny before Bonhoeffer in Finkenwalde where *LT* would be lived and taught, other foundational events were to come in the church struggle.

In the summer of 1934, Bonhoeffer continued to pastor in London to German-speaking congregations, however he had a busy few months ahead of him. He would be attending and speaking at a youth conference in August on the island of Fanø, Denmark. The preparations for this conference, according to Bethge, consumed him.[53] Bonhoeffer also had plans to visit Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) in India, about which he wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr in July of that summer. Those plans never materialized. He also expressed concern in that same letter to Niebuhr about further schism within the

---

[50]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 367.

[51]The original version and even the "August version" of the Bethel Confession would have served as a stronger and more biblically faithful rallying cry for the Confessing Church. See *DBWE* 12:374–424.

[52]Geffrey B. Kelly, introduction to *DBWE,* 5:12–13.

[53]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 372.

Confessing Church at the synod that would be held in the autumn in Dahlem.[54] The Dahlem synod would indeed become another pivotal point in the church struggle.

Reich Bishop Müller was formerly installed in September 1934 and the forceful measures he enacted brought about the need to move up the meeting of the Confessing Church synod. Müller had begun placing insubordinate Bishops and pastors under house arrest. Therefore, the Confessing synod in Dahlem met earlier than originally planned on October 19 and 20. The result of the synod was for the Confessing Church to officially separate from the Nazi Church.[55]

> We call upon the Christian congregations, their pastors and elders, to ignore any instructions received from the former Reich church government and its authorities and to refrain from cooperating with those who wish to obey that same church government. We call upon them to adhere to the directions of the Confessional synod of the German Evangelical Church and its recognized bodies.[56]

The statement made by the resolutions passed in Dahlem were the kind that were not easily retractable. Words like these were a clear statement of breaking with a church that had ceased to be a proper church. Luther's words of warning regarding the state's infringement into the affairs of the church were being acted upon by the Confessing Church.

> The temporal government has laws which extend no further than to life and property and external affairs on earth, for God cannot and will not permit anyone but himself to rule over the soul. Therefore, where the temporal authority presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God's government and only misleads souls and destroys them. We want to make this so clear that everyone will grasp it, and that our fine gentlemen, the princes and bishops, will see what fools they are where they seek to coerce the people with their laws and commandments into believing this or that.[57]

In obedience to their theological forebear, the Bethel Confession, the Ulm Declaration, the Barmen Declaration, and the Dahlem Synod blazed the path of the Confessing Church

---

[54]*DBWE,* 13:182–84.

[55]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 393.

[56]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 394–95.

[57]Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 441–42.

declaring its break from the Reich church. Bonhoeffer had his part in this movement and that part became life-defining for him. Bonhoeffer would leave his congregation in London to take the helm at one of the newly created Confessing Church seminaries.

Beginning in Zingst

On April 26, 1935, Bonhoeffer came to Zingst, Pomerania, with his first class of students. They began meeting in the Rhineland Bible School, which was out of use at that point. After two months, they moved to the country town of Finkenwalde, which would become their home for the next two years.[58] To be sure, all the events in Germany thus far had culminated in this moment for Bonhoeffer. His life, in congruence with the political upheaval impacting the church in which he served, brought him to Finkenwalde. Others were brought to Finkenwalde due to the same providential scenarios. What took place in those years in Pomerania were not in a vacuum, insulated from the issues inherent to Germany at large and the world itself, nevertheless a certain serenity seems to emerge from Bonhoeffer's seminary. In those two years, Bonhoeffer would live out many of the themes that were building in his own personal life as well as in his writing and ministry.

Geffrey Kelly made the case that what took place at Finkenwalde had its beginnings for Bonhoeffer in his time teaching at the University of Berlin. Bonhoeffer had given a series of lectures titled, "The Nature of the Church," where he expounded on themes present in *SC*.[59] The Finkenwalde experiment found its roots in Bonhoeffer's earliest work as well as his lectures in Berlin on the church. In these lectures, Bonhoeffer's emphasis on community in the church is a refrain prevalent throughout. After asking whether the church is needed, not only did he answer in the affirmative, but

---

[58]Kelly, introduction to *DBWE,* 5:13.

[59]Kelly, introduction to *DBWE,* 5:10.

he went on to emphatically say, "Community is necessary."[60] Bonhoeffer heavily emphasized the need for community, but he was careful to not divorce it from its *telos*. His view of the church, according to Kelly, was to be "the community of Jesus Christ that is within the world, yet free enough from the world to oppose secular idolatries and to do the courageous deeds required in serving others."[61] For Bonhoeffer, not only did the church have a purpose to be in community, but the community itself was to have a purpose.

Several of the students who first heard these lectures on "The Nature of the Church" at the University of Berlin in the summer of 1932 joined Bonhoeffer in Finkenwalde.[62] They joined in the educational element of that seminary, but also in its life, which focused on being a purposeful Christian community. In the autumn of 1935, it became clear that the seminary would not just be an education, but a lifestyle. Bethge explained how Bonhoeffer began to talk about the possibility of such a community late in the summer with his first round of students. By September of that year, it was drafted as an official proposal to be sent to the Council of the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union.[63] The proposal began with the following, "For several years now I, together with several younger brothers whose names appear below, have considered establishing a Protestant House of Brethren in which we wish as pastors to lead a communal Christian life."[64] Bethge was part the first group of students to commit to living in the House of Brethren and he signed the proposal along with Bonhoeffer. Bethge described the experience as being similar, in parts, to a monastic style of living,

---

[60]*DBWE*, 11:271–72.

[61]Kelly, introduction to *DBWE,* 5:11.

[62]Kelly, introduction to *DBWE,* 5:11.

[63]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 466.

[64]*DBWE*, 14:95.

without going quite that far. Though there was hesitation on the part of the Old Prussian Union to grant permission for Bonhoeffer to establish such a community, given its similarities to Roman Catholic practices and the urgent need for young theologians in the church, he received his permission.[65]

The House of Brethren and the entirety of the Finkenwalde seminary experience with Bonhoeffer was something of an anomaly, even amongst the Confessing Church. Charles Marsh explained the way that Bonhoeffer's seminary was viewed by some from the outside:

> While Finkenwalde operated within the ecclesial structures of the German Protestant Church, the decision to study with Bonhoeffer carried real risks. Only two months after classes began, the Old Prussian Union Council decided that the Confessing Church might call itself a "confessional movement" or "confessional front," but it did not have the legitimate status of *Kirche* (church). Thus study with Bonhoeffer became a badge of dissent, and in the eyes of the church authorities it was to mark oneself out as a "radical fanatic" and a disloyal German.[66]

Despite any negative views about what was happening at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer continued with what he viewed as his calling and his opportunity to both teach and live out his convictions.

The day-to-day life at Finkenwalde is best described in *LT* itself, with which the next chapter will engage in detail. While he lived and taught *LT*, Bonhoeffer gave the lectures that ended up being part of *CD*, which would be published towards the end of the life of Finkenwalde in the autumn of 1937.[67] Paul R. House gave a fitting description to what Bonhoeffer was seeking to do at Finkenwalde:

> His first goal was to form a community on proper grounds. This community would be like the one Jesus formed with his disciples, described in *The Cost of Discipleship*. It would exist to shape shepherds who in turn help churches develop into communing brothers and sisters in Christ. Daily worship, prayer, and meditation were means of shaving off remaining edges of selfishness, ambition,

---

[65]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 466–68.

[66]Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 234.

[67]Kelly, introduction to *DBWE,* 5:14.

wrongheaded individualism, and theological arrogance.[68]

Such a view of seminary education was countercultural to the norms of that time, but Bonhoeffer saw the long-term potential for good that it could bring. Participation in such a learning experience with Bonhoeffer, as has been stated, was a calculated risk. After Finkenwalde was shut down, Bonhoeffer wrote to his former students to encourage them in their various vocations and he mentions that four of their Finkenwalde brothers were in prison.[69] The reality of the times in which they lived and worked came back to the fore. That same scenario was to soon be Bonhoeffer's.

Geffrey Kelly stated that the shutting down of Finkenwalde by the Gestapo at the end of 1937 gave way for Bonhoeffer to write *LT*, which he was hesitant to do up until then. He wrote the book in late September 1938, while staying at his sister's house with Bethge in Göttingen, Lower Saxony.[70] In a letter Bonhoeffer wrote to Erwin Sutz on September 18, he said, "At the moment I have vacation and am trying to write something. But it goes slowly; I have too much else on my mind."[71] For having much on his mind, he worked tirelessly and finished the book in four weeks.[72] *LT* was first published in 1939 as the sixty-first volume in a series called *Theologische Existenz heute* (Theological Existence Today) and immediately sold well.[73]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the path to Finkenwalde for Bonhoeffer was as much Germany's story as it was his own. Providentially, events in Germany and circumstances

---

[68]Paul R. House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 137.

[69]*DBWE*, 15:20.

[70]Kelly, introduction to *DBWE,* 5:3.

[71]*DBWE*, 15:72.

[72]Kelly, introduction to *DBWE,* 5:4.

[73]Kelly, introduction to *DBWE,* 5:6.

of Bonhoeffer's life formed the context of *LT*. The twisting of Luther's writing on the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man paved the way for nationalism to poison not only the nation, but also the church. Many, like Bonhoeffer, were faced with decisions of obedience. The choice was clear for Bonhoeffer; he would choose obedience to Christ. His decision would influence others who would learn from him. One of the key lessons they learned was the importance of Christian community, particularly the type of community that is to exist in the church and even more specifically, in Christ. This lesson will be adequately worked out in the following chapter's treatment of *LT*.

CHAPTER 4

AN OVERVIEW OF *LIFE TOGETHER*

> If I remember correctly, it was Rott who introduced me this summer to the guide to scriptural meditation developed in your seminary. Although I read it attentively, I cannot really say that I was pleased by what I read. I just cannot go along with the fundamental distinction between theological work, on the one hand, and edifying reflection, on the other, such as emerges in this piece of writing and in your letter. I was also bothered in this piece by the smell—one rather difficult to articulate—of monastic eros and pathos, for which I now have neither the appropriate sensorium nor any real use, though they might well represent new possibilities compared to previous experiences in this area.[1]

Karl Barth, in this letter to Bonhoeffer, made reference to an addendum on Scripture meditation that was sent out with a circular letter to the students at Finkenwalde on May 22, 1936.[2] The content of the addendum, written by both Bonhoeffer and Bethge, served as source material for the discussion of Scripture meditation in *LT*.[3] There is no doubting that *LT*, both in its applied format in Finkenwalde and as a published work, is unique. Considering the context from which *LT* arose makes its content easier to understand. As I have shown in chapters two and three, *LT* finds its roots both in the historical context surrounding it as well as in the man who wrote it. Therefore, to take up *LT* and read it without both contexts in mind is unwise. Yet, there is also the context of the reader, which adds an additional layer to the consumption of this book as it would with any other book. Perhaps this is the error in Barth's response. Barth's statement has a tinge of unwarranted negativity to it, but he is right about its monastic impulses. One having any familiarity with the monastic movements of the past cannot miss those tones coloring the

---

[1]Karl Barth, "From Karl Barth, October 14, 1936," in *DBWE*, 14:268.

[2]The letter has not been published in the *DBWE* volumes, but the guide to scriptural meditation can be found in *DBWE*, 14:931–36.

[3]H. Gaylon Barker and Mark S. Brocker, *DBWE*, 14:931n1.

pages of this short book.

Bethge recounted key elements from a typical day at Finkenwalde and his description reads like a shortened version of *LT*:

> The day began and ended with two long services. In the morning the service was followed by a half-hour meditation, an exercise that was maintained even during the seminary's move, when their only furniture consisted of packing cases and youth hostel bunks. The services did not take place in church but around the ordinary dinner table. They invariably began with a choral psalm and a hymn selected for that day. This was followed by a lesson from the Old Testament, a set verse from a hymn (sung daily for several weeks), a New Testament lesson, a period of extempore prayer, and the recital of the Lord's Prayer. Each service concluded with another set verse from a hymn. Readings from the Psalms and the Scripture took the form of a *lectio continua*, if possible without any omissions, resembling Anglican evensong. Bonhoeffer believed this sequence of readings and prayers was the most natural and suitable form of worship for theologians. Only on Saturdays did he include a sermon, which was usually very direct.[4]

Such a methodology of worship and communal life is striking when set in contrast to contemporary piety. It is not surprising that so many have come to *LT* and discovered another world.

As with many of Bonhoeffer's writings, *LT* has become part of the theological grab-bag from which many traditions draw and interpret.[5] It has served as part of the impetus for the New Monasticism movement, which seeks to amplify the monastic tones of the book.[6] Across the spectrum of the church today, various tribes look to *LT* and use it to suit their tastes. Often, such use of a text which ignores the geographical, chronological, and various other differences from contemporary settings does a disservice to the text in question. As much as is possible, allowing the text to say what Bonhoeffer

---

[4]Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed., ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 428.

[5]See the following for several examples of various appropriations of Bonhoeffer and his writings: Matthew D. Kirkpatrick, ed. *Engaging Bonhoeffer: The Impact and Influence of Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004, and Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: Post-Holocaust Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

[6]Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: From After Virtue to a New Monasticism*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 61.

meant it to say is the optimum way to harvest the gold buried within a text like *LT*. This overview of *LT* will lay out Bonhoeffer's argumentation and logic, yet it will allow room for response and commentary.

The Structure of the Book

LT is a brief book, weighing in at less than one hundred pages. Despite its shorter length, it is thick with biblical, theological, and practical insight and wisdom. It is broken up into five chapters, which are not evenly balanced. The second chapter is nearly longer than the last three chapters combined. Nevertheless, the overall theme of the book is Christian community. It is as descriptive of its theme as it is prescriptive. In it, Bonhoeffer looked back on his experiences at Finkenwalde to give a testimony to his readers of what he has been a part and he then called his readers to take part.

The five chapters are as follows: Community, The Day Together, The Day Alone, Service, and Confession and the Lord's Supper. Even by considering the titles of the chapters it is easy to see how Bonhoeffer makes his argument. Once he laid the foundation of Christian community in the first chapter, he then expounded on aspects of the community in the other four.

Each chapter begins with a Scripture verse. As he developed his interpretation of each verse, the central focus of each chapter emerged. He cited numerous biblical passages throughout *LT*, not particularly focusing on any one biblical book or section. Bonhoeffer also relied on various sources in the book, at times just alluding to them and at other times supporting his argument with various quotes. Aside from the Bible, the most frequent sources he referred to are various older hymns, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, and several writings by Martin Luther.

The flow of the book is easy to follow, and his points are made clearly and succinctly. Aside from the content behind Scripture meditation coming from something Bonhoeffer and Bethge produced, Bethge explained how the earliest content of what

would later become *LT* came from lectures Bonhoeffer delivered at Finkenwalde.[7] Bonhoeffer stuck closely to the outline for each chapter, which points to the lecture background of the content.

The remainder of this chapter will summarize each chapter of *LT*. A general summary will be provided, followed by an analysis of the Scriptures and sources within and behind the chapter, as well as some critical response.

Summary of Chapter 1: Community

Bonhoeffer began by quoting, "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together un unity," (Ps 133:1 NRSV).[8] This verse captures the way that Bonhoeffer viewed community: he saw it as truly good and pleasant. Apart from simply quoting a verse, he set out to look at how the Scriptures can provide direction for "life together under the Word."[9] Bonhoeffer described the privilege that Christian community is, particularly living with other Christians. As a contrast, Jesus dwelt with enemies. This was true for him to the point of death on the cross. Therefore, those following Christ share in the same scenario he experienced, namely living among enemies or unbelievers. This encapsulates the purpose for Christians, that they live among unbelievers to proclaim and serve Christ. Jesus' followers find themselves spread across the earth waiting for the day when they will be drawn together in him.[10] "Until then, God's people remain scattered, held together in Jesus Christ alone, having become one because they remember *him* in the distant lands, spread out among the unbelievers."[11]

---

[7]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 462–63.

[8]The Bible quotations throughout this chapter will be exactly as they are represented in the *DBWE* volume of *LT*. At times the NRSV will be used; other times Bonhoeffer offers his own translation; and finally he uses the Luther Bible, for which the *DBWE* volume offers an English translation of the German.

[9]*DBWE,* 5:27.

[10]*DBWE,* 5:27–28.

[11]*DBWE,* 5:28.

In the meantime, Christian community anticipates the coming kingdom. However, not all who follow Jesus are able to experience the grace of community. Yet, as Bonhoeffer explained via the Apostle John in Revelation 1, even the lonely and exiled are comforted by their inclusion in the heavenly community in the Spirit, by the Word. Nevertheless, having other Christians around gives life and encouragement. Bonhoeffer provided examples of this in the relationship of Paul and Timothy or the way the Apostle John addressed those to whom he wrote his epistles.[12]

Normal Christian experience brings about a desire for company with brothers and sisters. Bonhoeffer made this case by beginning with creation such that God made humans with bodies. The Lord Jesus came in a body, suffered in a body, and was raised in a body. He points to the receiving of Jesus in the body in the Lord's Supper. Finally, believers will be resurrected in a body. Thus, a Christian praises the triune God for the bodily presence of another believer. For Bonhoeffer, the presence of Christ is mediated through the presence of another believer.[13] This was a central part of Bonhoeffer's argumentation throughout the book.

As much as community is to be a normal aspect of a Christian's life, Bonhoeffer acknowledged that the degree of community each person is granted can vary. Understanding these variations only exemplifies the fact that community is a gift. Yet, Bonhoeffer explained that the desire for community is inherent in every believer.[14]

"Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ."[15] For Bonhoeffer, Christian community was decidedly Christological. This is how Bonhoeffer can say Christians bring the presence of Christ to one another.

---

[12]*DBWE,* 5:28–29.

[13]*DBWE,* 5:29–30.

[14]*DBWE*, 5:30–31.

[15]*DBWE*, 5:31.

Bonhoeffer also used the description of belonging when it comes to the relationship of one believer to another in Christian community. Such belonging roots itself in what sounds like Bonhoeffer's attempt to describe the doctrine of union with Christ. If a believer is united with Christ, then there must be a relationship between all who are also united with Christ.[16]

Bonhoeffer further explained his idea that Christian community is in and through Jesus in three distinct ways. First, resting on the assumption that believers act as the presence of Christ to one another, Christians are in need of others around them. As in justification, Christians receive grace from outside themselves, that pattern continues in and through the expression of Christian community. Christians continue in speaking truth to one another and ministering the grace of Christ to one another.[17] Second, seeing a horizontal dimension to the mediating work of Christ, Bonhoeffer explained how Jesus enables peaceful community. Again, he focused on the unity believers have with Christ and the subsequent unity shared by believers.[18] Third, from eternity God decreed to elect and save the church through Jesus taking on flesh, uniting the church with Christ and the church with itself for eternity. This ensures true Christian community to be only and always about Christ and what he has done.[19]

> What persons are in themselves as Christians, in their inwardness and piety, cannot constitute the basis of our community, which is determined by what those persons are in terms of Christ. Our community consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. . . . I have community with others and will continue to have it only through Jesus Christ.[20]

Bonhoeffer vehemently stated that Christian community cannot be anything

---

[16]*DBWE*, 5:31.

[17]*DBWE*, 5:31–32.

[18]*DBWE*, 5:32–33.

[19]*DBWE*, 5:33–34.

[20]*DBWE*, 5:34.

other than what Jesus has intended it to be. From this statement, there are two central things that must be affirmed. First, "Christian community is not an ideal, but a divine reality."[21] Second, "Christian community is a spiritual and not a psychic reality."[22] These two points make up the remainder of the chapter as Bonhoeffer expounded on the implications of both.

In explaining the first important point about Christian communities, Bonhoeffer used the terms "wishful image,"[23] "dream,"[24] and "wishful dream"[25] to describe the ways Christian community can be viewed apart from Christ. It comes down to visions of how community should be, rather than the way in which Christ makes Christian community. Such dreams can be the cause for destruction to true Christian community. Community built on dreams is not built on the gospel and therefore does not rest on gospel promises. True Christian community is received from God as a gift.[26] "Like the Christian's sanctification, Christian community is a gift of God to which we have no claim. Only God knows the real condition of either our community or our sanctification. . . . Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate."[27]

The second point Bonhoeffer made about community is that it is created by the Holy Spirit. Community created by the Holy Spirit has the truth of the Scriptures as its foundation. The Word of God rules spiritual community. The opposite type of community finds itself based on fallen aspirations of humans. Such community is

---

[21]*DBWE*, 5:35.

[22]*DBWE*, 5:35.

[23]*DBWE*, 5:35.

[24]*DBWE*, 5:35.

[25]*DBWE*, 5:36.

[26]*DBWE*, 5:35–38.

[27]*DBWE*, 5:38.

characterized by darkness, while community made by the Spirit is full of light. The two types of community Bonhoeffer described find their footing either on Jesus Christ or on the wishful dreams of the members. Bonhoeffer linked the Holy Spirit with Jesus as both being inextricably involved and serving their appropriate roles in a proper Christian community. Therefore, Christian community is in Christ by the Spirit.[28]

Emotional community, the community not built on Christ by the Spirit, possesses other distorted forms of the true elements that belong only to Christian community. First, emotional community has the expectation of immediacy. All things in emotional community must happen right away, including relationships. Second, emotional community has its own type of conversion experience. A person is simply conquered by the whims of others in the community rather than being won over as in true conversion. Third, emotional community has its own way of loving one's neighbor. This type of love serves itself, not Christ.[29]

Spiritual community, which is built on Christ by the Spirit, produces rightly ordered love. Emotional community lacks the resources, namely Christ and his Spirit, to create spiritual love. This kind of love comes from Jesus and is displayed in the Word. The Word drives and defines what this love is. Love in a spiritual community works itself out through the mediation of Christ. This spiritual love allows Jesus to work in the lives of others, because it is only Jesus who has, can, and will work in them. Practically, spiritual love deals in the currency of the Word and prayer.[30]

The underlying assumption beneath emotional and spiritual community, and human ideals and God's reality is the discernment of believers. Emotional community and human ideals are likely to surface even within a Christ-centered community.

---

[28]*DBWE*, 5:38–40.

[29]*DBWE*, 5:40–43.

[30]*DBWE*, 5:43–44.

However, the onus is on those in the community to rightly understand what Christian community should be and to apply the disciplines a Christian community needs to maintain and bring it to maturity.[31] It is to these disciplines that Bonhoeffer turned for the remainder of the book.

Analysis of Chapter 1: Community

The first chapter of *LT* laid the groundwork for the book and is essentially the foundation of Bonhoeffer's thesis. He presented a Christocentric theology of community. Stephen Nichols described Bonhoeffer's overall approach to the Christian life to be Christotelic, which means that a Christian's life is lived "*toward Christ*."[32] This is a helpful term in understanding Bonhoeffer's theology of community, because the Christ-centeredness of community for Bonhoeffer is not merely from an ontological or philosophical viewpoint. For Bonhoeffer, Christian community has a purpose. What the Christian community entails, is in fact doing something. That idea is true for individual Christian lives as well. What Christians are in turn drives what they then do. For Bonhoeffer, the same was true of Christian communities.

From a biblical perspective, Bonhoeffer rooted his comments on community in various places throughout Scripture. There are a few key passages to which he referred in this first chapter that are worth noting. At the outset of the chapter, he quoted several times from Zechariah 10, applying the text to the church. As his Finkenwalde seminary was closed and as the Third Reich expanded their reach into the church in Germany, Bonhoeffer lamented, via Zechariah 10, the dispersion of his own Christian community. "Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me…," (Zech 10:9 NRSV). Mark Devine asserted Bonhoeffer's view of the ultimate

---

[31]*DBWE*, 5:45–47.

[32]Stephen J. Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life: From the Cross, For the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 131.

fulfillment of Christian community, "He anticipated blessings from the hand of the heavenly Father, but he understood that the largest part of these blessings comes only at the Last Day, at the inauguration of the coming universal reign of Christ."[33] Bonhoeffer saw this completed in Christ and he quotes this verse Zechariah 10 in expectation of the eventual gathering of the eschatological Christian community.[34]

Another passage he referred to at two different places in the chapter is in Ephesians. Bonhoeffer described the mediatorial work of Christ being both between God and men and amongst men.[35] "He is our peace . . ." (Eph 2:14 NRSV). The context of the passage talks about the separation of Jews and Gentiles prior to the coming of Christ. Bonhoeffer can certainly make this claim about Christ from the larger context of the passage. Paul goes on to say of his Jewish countrymen and the Gentiles that Christ "might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it" (Eph 2:16 NRSV). Bonhoeffer, again quoting Ephesians 2:14, bookended the chapter with a final point regarding the centrality of Christ in Christian community.[36] The complexity of Christ being peace for Christians was an important enough point for Bonhoeffer worthy of reaffirming.

Bonhoeffer also made use of extrabiblical sources in support of his thesis. There are two notable concepts in the chapter that he supported with indirect references to other resources. The first concept is that of justification and Bonhoeffer's reference is a general mention of what Martin Luther called "alien righteousness." Bonhoeffer discussed justification as a legal verdict or a pronouncement of righteousness, rather than justification being the process of making a person righteous. Bonhoeffer explained how

---

[33]Mark Devine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at All Costs* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 81.

[34]*DBWE*, 5:28.

[35]*DBWE*, 5:32–33.

[36]*DBWE*, 5:47.

Christians are declared righteous, which is on the basis of a righteousness that does not exist in Christians, but outside of them.[37] "Christians no longer live by their own resources, by accusing themselves and justifying themselves, but by God's accusation and God's justification. They live entirely by God's Word pronounced on them, in faithful submission to God's judgment, whether it declares them guilty or righteous."[38] Luther, in a sermon preached in 1519 titled "Two Kinds of Righteousness," differentiates the righteousness of Christ and that of the Christian. The first is what he referred to as alien righteousness.[39] "This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith, as it is written in 1 Corinthians 1[:30]: "Whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption."[40] The second kind of righteousness is the righteousness of the Christian. "This righteousness is the product of the righteousness of the first type, actually its fruit and consequence, for we read in Galatians 5[:22]: "But the fruit of the spirit [i.e., of a spiritual man, whose very existence depends on faith in Christ] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."[41] Thus, Bonhoeffer followed Luther in his view of justification and the impact it has on a Christian community.

The other important concept Bonhoeffer brought out is the desire that people have for intimacy. This is clear in Bonhoeffer's own personal life as he regularly discussed the value of relationships. Bonhoeffer rooted this concept of desire for intimacy in a phrase familiar to him and his contemporaries, "I and You."[42] This phrase comes

---

[37]*DBWE*, 5:31.

[38]*DBWE*, 5:31.

[39]Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed., ed. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 119–21.

[40]Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 119.

[41]Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 121.

[42]*DBWE*, 5:41.

from a book by Martin Buber titled *I and Thou*. In it, Buber discussed relationships in different spheres: nature, other people, and spiritual beings. Yet others can only be considered a *Thou* in Buber's view when speech is possible, thus only other people and spiritual beings are able to be a proper *Thou* since both speak.[43] Buber explained,

> If I face a human being as my *Thou*, and say the primary word *I–Thou* to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things. Thus human being is not *He* or *She*, bounded from every other *He* and *She*, a specific point in space and time within the net of the world; nor is he a nature able to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. But with no neighbour, and whole in himself, he is *Thou* and fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in *his* light.[44]

What Buber upheld is the value of the other. This is a theme Bonhoeffer picked up throughout *LT*, as he extolled both the importance of Christ and of the other person, who in a Christian community can be the source of Christ to another. Buber's ideas are laced throughout *LT* and show up in later chapters, showing the impact they had on Bonhoeffer.

In the first chapter of *LT,* Bonhoeffer set a foundation for Christian community in Scripture. He also entered into his theological tradition looking back to Luther and to contemporary philosophical views on relationships to uphold the core elements of Christian community. In the chapters to follow, Bonhoeffer outlined the structure and fruit of Christian community akin to Luther's description of the second kind of righteousness.

Summary of Chapter 2: The Day Together

After beginning by quoting Luther's translation of a hymn by Ambrose titled "O Blessed Light," Bonhoeffer references a verse from the third chapter of Colossians.[45] "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . ." (Col 3:16a NRSV). This verse captures

---

[43]Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 6–7.

[44]Buber, *I and Thou*, 8.

[45]*DBWE*, 5:48.

the essence of the chapter. Bonhoeffer was concerned to show all that the Word does in the midst of the Christian community. As the title of the chapter shows, Bonhoeffer described the day of a Christian community as it lives and worships together.

The day of worship is to have three essential elements to it: Scripture, hymns, and prayer. These elements are all essential parts of monastic life. They are specifically part of the monastic life of the Augustinian order, of which Martin Luther, Bonhoeffer's primary theological forefather, was once a part. Augustinian monks were to take part in various Scripture readings each day, some of which were responsive.[46] Monks of this order were also to give themselves to prayer and to singing hymns.[47] Since these practices are embedded in the monastic life, Bonhoeffer's approach appears all the more countercultural.

The day of the Christian life together begins first thing in the morning. "The early morning belongs to the church of the risen Christ. At the break of light it remembers the morning on which death, the devil, and sin were brought low in defeat, and new life and salvation were given to human beings."[48] Such a truth requires a response of worship from the Christian community. The day begins with worship and the worship begins with the Psalms. As in his epistle to the Colossians, Paul calls the Ephesians to do likewise, "speak to one another with Psalms" (Eph 5:19, Bonhoeffer's translation).[49]

Bonhoeffer emphasized praying the Psalms particularly. He asked the question that many have asked about the Psalms: "How can God's Word be at the same time

---

[46]Augustine, *The Augustine Series*, vol. 4, *The Monastic Rule*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Agatha Mary and Gerald Bonner (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 106.

[47]Augustine, *The Augustine Series*, vol. 4, *The Monastic Rule*, 112.

[48]*DBWE*, 5:49.

[49]*DBWE*, 5:53.

prayer to God?"[50] Yet, that is precisely what the Psalms are, God's Word that are to be prayer to God. Bonhoeffer wrote a small book on the Psalms attempting to delve further into this wonderful mystery.

> If we want to read and to pray the prayers of the Bible, and especially the Psalms, we must not, therefore, first ask what they have to do with us, but what they have to do with Jesus Christ. We must ask how we can understand the Psalms as God's Word, and only then can we pray them with Jesus Christ. Thus it does not matter whether the Psalms express exactly what we feel in our heart at the moment we pray. Perhaps it is precisely the case that we must pray against our own heart in order to pray rightly. It is not just that for which we ourselves want to pray that is important, but that for which God wants us to pray.[51]

Bonhoeffer picked up this theme in *LT* by stating that the Psalms are Jesus' prayer for the church. Thus, the church joins Jesus in his prayer when it prays the Psalms.[52]

Bonhoeffer argued that praying the Psalms teaches prayer. First, praying the Psalms shows what prayer is, namely that it is praying on the foundation of God's promises.[53] Second, praying the Psalms teaches what should be prayed.[54] Third, praying the Psalms teaches how to pray in community.[55] Once the Psalms are prayed through in the midst of the Christian community, a hymn is sung and the next portion of the day of worship begins.[56]

Bonhoeffer quoted from Paul's first letter to Timothy, "Give attention to the public reading of Scripture . . ." (1 Tim 4:13 NRSV). Bonhoeffer pushed against Scripture readings being done through only brief passages. He gave the examples of the small meditation books printed by the Moravian Brethren or small calendars with a verse

---

[50]*DBWE*, 5:53.

[51]*DBWE*, 5:157.

[52]*DBWE*, 5:55.

[53]*DBWE*, 5:55.

[54]*DBWE*, 5:56–57.

[55]*DBWE*, 5:57–58.

[56]*DBWE*, 5:58.

or two per day. Though these things or things like them can be helpful, they are not to be the only intake of Scripture for the church.[57] Bonhoeffer rooted his stance against smaller readings in the way in which Scripture has been given to the church. "The Holy Scriptures do not consist of individual sayings, but are a whole and can be used most effectively as such."[58] Therefore, as with other practices in which the church participates, the public reading of Scripture can be a formative practice, helping the hearers grow and be stretched.

Bonhoeffer suggested the practice of *lectio continua*, wherein books of the Bible are read through consecutively. Such a practice would occur regularly in churches following a lectionary in their liturgy.[59] This practice immerses the congregation into the story unfolding in Scripture. "The community of believers is drawn into the Christmas story, the baptism, the miracles and discourses, the suffering, dying, and rising of Jesus Christ."[60] It is Jesus Christ that Bonhoeffer argued the church's attention should be directed towards in the reading of Scripture.

> It is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel, in God's son Jesus Christ, than to discover what God intends for us today. The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I will die. And the fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead is the sole ground of my hope that I, too, will be raised on the day of judgment.[61]

Thus, as is to be expected with Bonhoeffer, the public reading of Scripture for the Church was decidedly Christocentric.

Bonhoeffer called for Christians to know the Scriptures like the Reformers did. Most importantly, that means that Christians need to know the Scriptures for salvation.

---

[57]*DBWE*, 5:59.

[58]*DBWE*, 5:60.

[59]*DBWE*, 5:61.

[60]*DBWE*, 5:61.

[61]*DBWE*, 5:62.

Also, Christians need to know the Scriptures to make significant decisions. Christians need to know the Scriptures to gain confidence in the direction of their lives. Finally, Christians need to know the Scriptures in order to minister to others in their troubles.[62] For Bonhoeffer, all of these benefits came through the means of the public reading of Scripture.

The last section of his discussion of the public reading of Scripture deals with how it is to be done. He has already advocated for reading longer passages and preferably consecutive readings. He offered additional counsel for the reading of Scripture such as how it should be read. His advice is best summarized in the opinion that public Scripture reading should be done in a way that directs the hearer's attention to God.[63]

The next significant part of the day of Christians in community together is singing. This practice, Bonhoeffer stated, brings together praying the Psalms and the public Scripture reading.[64] This chapter of *LT* is full of quotations from various hymns, both ancient and contemporary for Bonhoeffer. This shows Bonhoeffer's love of hymnody and his own belief of their value. Also, in keeping with his appreciation for the Psalms, he quoted a familiar refrain from them, "O sing to the Lord a new song . . ." (Ps 96:1 NRSV). As music is a type of crescendo of worship and thanksgiving, Bonhoeffer presents it as the right response to the Word.

Bonhoeffer presented the order of worship as he does with a purpose. The response of singing follows the Word. Thus, he argued for a few prerequisites of Christians singing together properly. There should be a dedication to the Word. The community of Christians should be bound together in Christ and all parts of the community should be included. Each member of the community should exhibit humility

---

[62]*DBWE*, 5:63.

[63]*DBWE*, 5:63–64.

[64]*DBWE*, 5:65.

in singing. Finally, discipline should characterize the entire approach of congregational singing. Bonhoeffer returned to Ephesians 5:19 to summarize what takes place in congregational singing.[65]

Having approached it from a spiritual perspective, he made some practical comments about singing in unison. Bonhoeffer himself was an accomplished musician such that earlier in life he thought he might pursue music professionally.[66] It is from his musical sensibility that he called out things that can be hostile to such singing. Each of the practical things he mentioned find their root in the prerequisites he has already mentioned. Bonhoeffer found no place for those that want to draw attention to themselves in congregational singing either through the boisterous display of their talents, their lack of self-awareness to discern that they have no talent to boast about, or their being unwilling to participate. Each of these things can be harmful to God-honoring congregational singing.[67]

The next portion of the day is corporate prayer. Having already prayed the Psalms together, this type of prayer in Christian community looks different. Bonhoeffer began by quoting Jesus from Matthew's Gospel. "If two of you agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven" (Matt 18:19, Bonhoeffer's translation).[68] For Bonhoeffer to refer to this verse shows something about how he looks at this type of prayer, namely that it is something the community does together. Yet, that does not simply mean just the practice of praying, but the things for which the congregation prays. The struggle with this prayer comes because it is in the people's own words. Unlike praying the Psalms, this prayer is free, made up of the words of the people,

---

[65]*DBWE*, 5:66.

[66]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 24–25.

[67]*DBWE*, 5:67–68.

[68]*DBWE*, 5:68.

and is spoken back to God.[69] Yet, one could argue that this prayer is not totally free, because it has followed the praying of the Psalms, the public reading of Scripture, and the congregational singing in the flow of worship. Thus, this prayer is informed by what has already occurred in the community in and around the Word.

An important aspect of the prayer for the Christian community is that it is the prayer of the community. Bonhoeffer was careful to distinguish that this prayer is not that of the individual, but of the community. This presupposes the praying individuals in the community are a part of the community and thus know what to pray. Knowledge of the community and its needs is essential. Furthermore, those praying for the community need the prayer of other individuals of the community in order to rightly pray for the community.[70]

Praying for the community is a responsibility. Bonhoeffer argued against passing off this duty because someone feels unfit for it. This is an opportunity for the person tasked to pray to know the duty of serving their community in this way. Also, the community should be relied upon to uphold in prayer the one praying for them.[71]

Bonhoeffer dealt with two scenarios involving corporate prayer. The first is the question of whether to use set prayers or not. Bonhoeffer stated that they can be a help, but they can also be a disservice to prayer. Relying on set prayers could be a way in which the church deceives itself about the quality of their prayer life. Second, Bonhoeffer grappled with the helpfulness of special prayer groups. Such a group should not be sought after by force nor as a means of divisiveness. In other words, a special prayer group should not be an exclusive group meant to separate some.[72]

---

[69]*DBWE*, 5:68–69.

[70]*DBWE*, 5:69–70.

[71]*DBWE*, 5:70.

[72]*DBWE*, 5:71.

The next aspect of Christian life together is the breaking of bread. Bonhoeffer stated that God's Word and the worship it provokes comes before breaking bread. He referred to the disciples on the road to Emmaus with Jesus in Luke's Gospel, wherein they ended the day at table with Jesus.[73]

> The Scriptures speak of three kinds of community at the table that Jesus keeps with his own: the daily breaking of bread together at meals, the breaking of bread together at the Lord's Supper, and the final breaking of bread together in the reign of God. But in all three, the one thing that counts is that "their eyes were opened and they recognized him."[74]

For Bonhoeffer, in each of these kinds of community with Jesus the Christian is called to recognize Jesus as the giver, to know all that is received is for the sake of Jesus, and to be assured of Jesus' desire to be present with his people in these modes of community.[75] Lastly, the breaking of bread is a regular reminder of celebration and rest in the Lord. Also, for the community of Christians, the breaking of bread invokes a responsibility to act as a community and share the common bread the Lord provides.[76]

A final element of a day of Christian life together is work. Bonhoeffer balanced work and prayer explaining that one cannot exist without the other. Work provides opportunities for prayer and prayer empowers work. In attempting to show how work ultimately serves God, Bonhoeffer developed a path from work to the fulfillment of Paul's exhortation to the church in Colossae.[77] "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus . . . " (Col 3:17, Bonhoeffer's translation).[78] The way by which Bonhoeffer got there is by again referring to the "*I-Thou*" dichotomy

---

[73]*DBWE*, 5:72.

[74]*DBWE*, 5:72.

[75]*DBWE*, 5:72–73.

[76]*DBWE*, 5:73–74.

[77]*DBWE*, 5:75–76.

[78]*DBWE*, 5:76.

that Martin Buber described in his book *I and Thou*. Buber compared the world of *It* with the world of *Thou*. The world of *It* represents cold, immaterial things.[79] The world of *Thou* is the opposite, dealing in personal, material things or more specifically, the things of God.[80] Bonhoeffer used this dichotomy to show how Christians realize their work in the world of *It* is done for the *Thou*. In other words, Christians work in the world for God and rely on his strength through prayer.[81]

Bonhoeffer closed the chapter by walking through the order of the day. The time of worship and prayer in the morning serves the day of work. If possible, Christians gather at midday for a brief period of rest. Finally, at the close of the day Christians in life together gather again for worship. Thus, the Christian community acknowledges the Lord's sovereignty over the day and over them as his people.[82]

Analysis of Chapter 2: The Day Together

There are several notable things about the second chapter of the book. First, it is the longest chapter. In comparison with the chapter that follows it, which talks about individual worship, one could surmise that Bonhoeffer put a great deal of stock in corporate worship over and above private worship. Second, it is deeply biblical. Nearly seventy times Bonhoeffer either quoted, alluded to, or mentioned passages of Scripture. Third, it is deeply doxological. Bonhoeffer directly quoted and referred to a number of hymns from various periods of church history. Also, the chapter is devoted to describing various aspects of corporate worship in a Christian community. Lastly, it is deeply ecclesiological. Though the book is written to describe communal Christian living, the practices that Bonhoeffer described are decidedly ecclesial. It is worth further analyzing

---

[79]Buber, *I and Thou*, 54.

[80]Buber, *I and Thou*, 62–63.

[81]*DBWE*, 5:75–76.

[82]*DBWE*, 5:76–80.

several of these notable characteristics of the chapter.

The first characteristic worth further investigating is the abundance of biblical references in this chapter. Though Bonhoeffer was not without biblical references in the first chapter of the book, the consistency and frequency of his use of the Bible in the second chapter is noticeably increased. William Macleod recently commented on Bonhoeffer's view of the Bible claiming that it fell short of a contemporary evangelical view of the Bible.[83] Macleod provided several supposed quotations from Bonhoeffer, but without proper citation. One such quotation had Bonhoeffer claiming that Scripture witnesses to divine revelation. Macleod made a dichotomy between believing that Scripture witnesses to divine revelation and believing that Scripture is divine revelation.[84] Macleod is not wrong in making that distinction, but he does seem to have Bonhoeffer wrong. At least, he has the Bonhoeffer of *LT* wrong. Of the Bible, Bonhoeffer said, "It is God's revealed Word for all peoples, for all times. . . . The Scriptures are God's revealed Word as a whole."[85] That is quite different from Macleod's characterization of Bonhoeffer. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer's use of Scripture in the chapter assumes authority therein. In other words, what the Scriptures say to do in terms of worship, Bonhoeffer commended to be done. Various times in the second chapter specifically, Bonhoeffer referred to what the Scriptures say to do, thus it seems he thought that when Scripture speaks, God speaks.[86] Simply taking Bonhoeffer's writing in *LT* and in the second chapter particularly, it is evident he held a high view of Scripture.

Another important characteristic of this chapter is its doxological emphasis. Bonhoeffer made extensive use of hymns throughout the chapter and not just in places

---

[83]William Macleod, "Bonhoeffer—A Reliable Guide?" *Free Church Witness* (September 2016), 4.

[84]Macleod, "Bonhoeffer – A Reliable Guide?," 4.

[85]*DBWE*, 5:60.

[86]*DBWE*, 5:51, 55, 64, 72, 77.

where he described corporate singing.[87] In the preface to a hymnal of German hymns translated into English, Catherine Winkworth writes about the importance of hymnody to the German people from the time of the Reformation and after.[88] Thus, it seems a hardy love for hymns became embedded into the fabric of what it meant to be Lutheran. Bonhoeffer seems to have stood firmly in that tradition. One such hymn he quoted at the start of the chapter is by Johann Heermann. Winkworth's English translation gave the hymn the title, "Christ Our Champion,"[89] while the German title, "*Frühmorgens da die Sonn' aufgeht*," is simply the first line of the hymn.[90] Heermann's hymn is an Easter hymn pointing to the finished work of the resurrected Jesus.[91] About this hymn, Bonhoeffer stated, "So sang the church of the Reformation."[92] Bonhoeffer desired to be Christ-centered even in his singing. Some of the other hymns Bonhoeffer mentioned were written by the Bohemian Brethren, a group that left a lasting impact on him.[93] This impact likely stemmed from his mother's time in Herrnhut with the Moravian Brethren when she was younger.[94] Bonhoeffer's upbringing in music, love of hymnody in his theological tradition, and biblical conviction for worship coalesced in a hymn-besotted exhortation to worship.

Finally, the last characteristic to note from the second chapter of *LT* is the ecclesial nature of the disciplines he espouses. Nothing that Bonhoeffer exhorted his

---

[87]According to *DBWE*, 5:186–88, Bonhoeffer cited from the following hymnals in *LT*: *Evangelisches Gesangbuch für Brandenburg und Pommern* (Berlin/Frankfurt, 1931) and Otto Riethmüller, ed. *Ein neues Lied* (Berlin-Dahlem, 1932).

[88]Catherine Winkworth, preface to *Lyra Germanica*, 2nd series, *The Christian Life* (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1859), v–xii.

[89]Johann Heermann, "Christ Our Champion," in *Lyra Germanica*, 64–65.

[90]Geffrey B. Kelly, *DBWE*, 5:48n2.

[91]Heermann, "Christ Our Champion," in *Lyra Germanica*, 64–65.

[92]*DBWE*, 5:48.

[93]*DBWE*, 5:49–50.

[94]Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 35.

readers to do is outside the realm of normal church practice. At least in the history of the church, he has not suggested a new path of spirituality. It has already been mentioned that many saw the practices in which he required his seminarians at Finkenwalde to take part to be odd. Praying through Psalms, public Scripture reading, singing in unison, and extemporaneous prayer should not have been shocking practices to anyone frankly, as they are quite normal from a biblical standpoint. Many would not have to look far to find these elements in contemporary churches. They were or are perhaps not practiced the same way or more specifically with the same frequency as Bonhoeffer encouraged, nevertheless they can be considered normal church practices. Keeping this in mind negates any view that Bonhoeffer suggested a novel path of spirituality.

Summary of Chapter 3: The Day Alone

As Bonhoeffer has made his case for the day of a Christian community, he then described the day of each individual in a Christian community. Bonhoeffer began with his own translation of a verse from the Psalms, which sets the tone for the chapter. "The praise of silence befits you, O God, in Zion" (Ps 65:1, Bonhoeffer's translation).[95] Bonhoeffer's choice to highlight this particular translation points to one of the main themes of the chapter, namely silence. However, before he discussed silence, he made a distinction between being alone and being in community.

Community cannot be an escape from being alone, just as being alone cannot be an escape from community. As Bonhoeffer has already argued that community cannot be based on someone's dream or wish, that principle was applied here in considering the inevitability of people spending time alone and seeking community. For Bonhoeffer, setting Christian community up as this deliverance from loneliness will be a

[95]*DBWE*, 5:81.

disappointment.[96]

Looking to passages from Luther, Bonhoeffer set up a dialectic to grapple with being alone and being in community. “Whoever cannot be alone should beware of community.”[97] In a sermon Luther preached on March 9, 1522, he reminded his hearers that each must face God for himself and be concerned about what it means to be a Christian.[98] Riffing on Luther’s words, Bonhoeffer made the point that every person has to face the prospect of being alone and ultimately of being alone before God. “Whoever cannot stand being in community should beware of being alone.”[99] In a treatise Luther wrote about the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, he sought to show the importance of the sacrament in the life of the congregation. He discussed the unifying power of the sacrament amongst those partaking.[100] In the midst of believers being alone, the Christian life calls believers into community and necessitates it as normal Christian practice with all of its challenges and implications. Therefore, Bonhoeffer balanced the day together and the day alone as two integral parts of normal Christian experience.[101]

The first core characteristic of the day alone for the Christian is silence. Bonhoeffer argued that silence is not an inability to speak, but a disciplined, intentional choice not to speak. “There is a time . . . to keep silence and a time to speak” (Eccl 3:7, Luther Bible translation). Silence for Bonhoeffer revolved around the Word. The Scriptures can bring about silence in the hearer and they require silence to receive

---

[96]*DBWE*, 5:81–82.

[97]*DBWE*, 5:82.

[98]Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 70–71.

[99]*DBWE*, 5:82.

[100]Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 54.

[101]*DBWE*, 5:83.

them.[102] "In the end, silence means nothing other than waiting for God's Word and coming from God's Word with a blessing."[103] Silence with the Scriptures can impact the rest of the day. However, when it is divorced from God's Word, it is not biblical silence. Therefore, it does not produce biblical fruit. Such silence allows believers to develop disciplines in themselves that ultimately serve the community.[104]

The next core characteristic of the day alone for the Christian is solitude. For Bonhoeffer, solitude cannot be separated from silence, nor vice-versa. Solitude, like silence, is not an end in and of itself, but provides opportunity for three core things: meditation on Scripture, prayer, and intercession.[105] It is not surprising Bonhoeffer prescribed similar disciplines for the individual as were prescribed for the community, namely attention to the Word and prayer. These show themselves to be essential to the Christian life, whether in community or not. In the circular letter to the Finkenwalde students of which Barth was critical, Bonhoeffer said, "For me the daily silent reflection on the word of God as it applies to me—even if only for a few minutes—tends to become the crystallization of all that brings inner and outer order to my life."[106] Bonhoeffer placed disciplines of the Word and prayer all under the banner of meditation.

> The period of meditation is useful for personal consideration of Scripture, personal prayer, and personal intercession. It serves no other purpose. Spiritual experiments have no place here. But there must be time for these three things, because it is precisely God who requires them of us. . . . This time of meditation does not allow us to sink into the void and bottomless pit of aloneness, rather it allows us to be alone with the Word. In so doing it gives us solid ground on which to stand and clear guidance for the steps we have to take.[107]

---

[102]*DBWE*, 5:84–85.

[103]*DBWE*, 5:85.

[104]*DBWE*, 5:85–86.

[105]*DBWE*, 5:86.

[106]*DBWE*, 16:252.

[107]*DBWE*, 5:86–87.

The first part of meditation begins with Scripture. Different than his recommendations for corporate Scripture reading, Bonhoeffer suggested small, brief passages for personal reading. The reason for this is to allow each sentence, phrase, or even word to have its impact. The point is to linger over the Word until it does its work. Therefore, the intention is not to trudge through a passage or even a verse, but to dwell on the Word. This requires patience, allowing God to work through his Word by seeking God through his Word. Such a practice dissuades the reader from seeking experiences and instead looks for God to do whatever he wills.[108]

Time in Scripture leads to prayer. Following this pattern allows for prayer to be based on the Word, just as it is in the Christian community. The personal nature of this time of prayer is juxtaposed against the ways in which one might pray in the community. This time of prayer finds itself to be intensely personal. Yet, a challenge that arises in being alone and silent before God in prayer is the inevitability of the mind to wander. Bonhoeffer suggested committing the things to which one's mind wanders to prayer, rather than trying to correct one's thinking. This may lead to intercession for those who have come to mind, which is the third practice to be pursued in the solitude and silence of the day.[109]

Intercession relies on the time of Scripture reading just as prayer does. In so doing, God through his Word instructs and guides the intercession offered. Bonhoeffer placed enormous value on intercessory prayer. It serves individuals in the community, but it ultimately serves the community as a whole. Intercessory prayer is a means of grace for the community. Difficulties in relationships and other struggles in the community are disarmed through intercession. The practice is a grace, but also a duty or service Christians owe others in the congregation. The neglect of this practice displays a lack of

---

[108]*DBWE*, 5:88–89.

[109]*DBWE*, 5:89.

love for others in the community.[110] "Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the community must enter every day."[111] For Bonhoeffer, intercession was a vital aspect of the fulfillment of the Christian's day alone, which ultimately served the community's day together.

The practices of silence and solitude and the practices therein, come up against the realities of the day. The day proves the worth of one's time of meditation. Bonhoeffer did not suggest that anything could be wrong with God's Word or that any fault could lie with God in the possible inadequacy of someone's time of meditation. Instead, Bonhoeffer showed how a person could misuse the disciplines and harm themselves or the community.[112] "Every act of self-discipline by a Christian is also a service to the community."[113] Thus, Bonhoeffer returned to the inescapable connection of the personal and corporate dimensions of the Christian life.

Analysis of Chapter 3: The Day Alone

There are two significant elements in this chapter. First, Bonhoeffer provided a healthy balance to the corporate aspects of Christian community by highlighting the importance of meditation in Christian spirituality. Second, in this chapter Bonhoeffer began to show his reliance on Thomas à Kempis' book *The Imitation of Christ*.

A powerful biblical example Bonhoeffer gave to describe the act of meditation is in his mention of Mary hearing the angel's words about the birth of Jesus. "But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19 NRSV).[114] Mary's example in hearing nearly unbelievable news from an angel of the Lord is to quietly

---

[110]*DBWE*, 5:90–91.

[111]*DBWE*, 5:90.

[112]*DBWE*, 5:91–92.

[113]*DBWE*, 5:92.

[114]*DBWE*, 5:88.

receive and consider what she heard. For Bonhoeffer to use this example basically means he considered Mary to have meditated on what she heard. Now, at the time of Christ's birth, Mary was a young person, seemingly insignificant. Yet, she was able to meditate on the Word, which is a great example to believers. It shows that meditation is a normative Christian practice and simple enough in which all can take part.

Bonhoeffer's use of Thomas à Kempis was a change from his usual references throughout *LT*. He heavily referred to Martin Luther and others in his theological tradition. *The Imitation of Christ* is a difficult work to summarize, as it has less of a cohesive thesis and is more intended to be a devotional work.[115] Bonhoeffer's attention to this devotional classic in this chapter and in various other places throughout *LT* displays the value Bonhoeffer placed on it. Geffrey Kelly explained that this work was one of Bonhoeffer's favorites. He read it often, even later when he was in Tegel Prison. That copy was given to Bishop George Bell by Bonhoeffer's parents after Bonhoeffer's death.[116] In a passage in the vein of Bonhoeffer's emphasis of silence and solitude, à Kempis wrote, "No one is secure except the person who freely keeps to himself. No one speaks securely except the person who willingly keeps silent."[117] The piety à Kempis prescribed was clearly appealing to Bonhoeffer and he sought to retrieve it to describe the believer's day alone.

Summary of Chapter 4: Service

Bonhoeffer has already dealt with the necessity of loving others in the Christian community, but in his fourth chapter focusing on service, he was more explicit in how that was to be done. He began with a scene from Luke's Gospel: "An argument

---

[115]According to *DBWE*, 5:189, Bonhoeffer's personal copy of *The Imitation of Christ* was Thomas à Kempis, *Werke*, vol. 2, *Imitatio Christi*, ed. M.J. Pohl (Freiburg, 1904).

[116]Kelly, *DBWE*, 5:85n10.

[117]Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. William C. Creasy (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 21.

started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest" (Luke 9:46, Bonhoeffer's translation).[118] The disciples were busy deciding who was most important among them as they walked with Jesus. Bonhoeffer pointed out that this type of attitude is detrimental to community. He also acknowledged the natural tendency people have to compare themselves to those around them. The beginnings of discord like what existed between the disciples can quickly arise in any Christian community.[119]

The place that Bonhoeffer began in calling a Christian community to service is perhaps not where one would expect. The first service Bonhoeffer said a community can provide to one another starts with the discipline of the tongue. "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear" (Eph 4:29 NRSV). Bonhoeffer believed practicing such discipline makes way for a breakthrough in community.[120]

> God did not make others as I would have made them. God did not give them to me so that I could dominate and control them, but so that I might find the Creator by means of them. Now other people, in the freedom with which they were created, become an occasion for me to rejoice, whereas before they were only a nuisance and trouble for me. God does not want me to mold others into the image that seems good to me, that is, into my own image. Instead, in their freedom from me God made other people in God's own image. I can never know in advance how God's image should appear in others.[121]

Such a community looks for its justification by grace not in justifying itself. There is therefore no room for pride, but only humility in such a community.[122]

Learning how to serve others must begin with humility: "[You should] not…think of yourself more highly than you ought to think" (Rom 12:3 NRSV). According to Bonhoeffer, this kind of thinking can only come from considering oneself

---

[118]*DBWE*, 5:93.

[119]*DBWE*, 5:93–94.

[120]*DBWE*, 5:94–95.

[121]*DBWE*, 5:95.

[122]*DBWE*, 5:96.

in light of what Christ has done. It is a kind of gospel-informed self-awareness. This will allow people in a community to prioritize others above themselves both in their honor and their will.[123] "What does it matter if I suffer injustice? Would I not have deserved even more severe punishment from God if God had not treated me with mercy?"[124] Only this kind of thinking can come from and be maintained by the grace of Jesus Christ. Finally, Christians must align themselves with how Paul thought of himself in his first letter to Timothy: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost" (1 Tim 1:15 NRSV).

Bonhoeffer then outlined three ways Christians can serve one another according to the Scriptures. The first way is through listening. How Christians listen to one another and the attitudes they have with one another can be directly related to how they listen to God and the attitude they have toward God.[125] The second way Christians can serve one another in a community is what Bonhoeffer called "active helpfulness."[126] "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God, who will thwart our plans and frustrate our ways time and again, even daily, by sending people across our path with their demands and requests."[127] The third kind of service is bearing one another's burdens. Because Christ suffered for and bore the burdens of humans, believers in Christ can bear other's burdens and so "fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2).[128] Part of the burden that believers carry for others is because of the freedom others have. The freedom of the other may at times infringe on one's own freedom. The greatest way this

---

[123]*DBWE*, 5:97.

[124]*DBWE*, 5:97.

[125]*DBWE*, 5:98–99.

[126]*DBWE*, 5:99.

[127]*DBWE*, 5:99.

[128]*DBWE*, 5:100–101.

freedom impacts the community is when others abuse their freedom in sin. Yet this is part of bearing with others, namely bearing with the sin of others. Service in bearing with others' sin is offering forgiveness.[129]

All service rendered in a Christian community is based on the Word, yet the greatest service that Christians can offer others is serving them with the Word. Serving others with the Word is for each person to give to each other person. Serving others with the Word is connected with the other ways of serving, because they can at times be combined. Bearing with others may require God's Word to be spoken to them. This assumes that believers allow others to speak God's Word to them. This could become especially challenging when someone is in sin, yet God's Word must be spoken to those in sin. To avoid doing so is to deny them of God's grace. The Christian community is one marked by a combined desire to come under the obedience of the Word of God.[130]

Analysis of Chapter 4: Service

In essence, the way Bonhoeffer described a Christian community throughout *LT* has to do with service. He does so, because service is central to the biblical pattern of the Christian life. Throughout his chapter on the day together for a Christian community, he has described how Christians serve one another through corporate spiritual disciplines. Yet, in this chapter on service, Bonhoeffer has brought together both corporate and private spiritual disciplines that are a way of service to others. There are three elements to note from this chapter. The first is Bonhoeffer's biblical basis for service. The second is Bonhoeffer's use of Thomas à Kempis in describing service. The third is the background of Luther in parts of Bonhoeffer's approach to service.

Bonhoeffer began by biblically looking at the discipline of the tongue as a

---

[129]*DBWE*, 5:101–3.

[130]*DBWE*, 5:103–7.

foundation for serving others. Having used James 4:11–12 and Ephesians 4:29 as primary texts to call for the discipline of the tongue, Bonhoeffer showed how Christian service requires personal discipline in the one serving.[131] Bonhoeffer then spent some time in the early part of Romans 12 to show the necessity of using one's mind and heart in Christian service.[132] Before he ever got to talking about acts of service, he showed God's desire through the Word that the Christian servant be sanctified. Rather than simply walking through acts of service, Bonhoeffer illustrated a God-honoring approach to service.

Thomas à Kempis returned to the foreground in this chapter. The piety that à Kempis prescribes can sound almost monastic, but Bonhoeffer sought to normalize it. By using à Kempis, Bonhoeffer did not call Christians to be monastic, but showed that what can be viewed as primarily monastic is often simply Christian. One that had any familiarity with Bonhoeffer and specifically *LT* might very well think these words from à Kempis to be Bonhoeffer's: "Likewise, one cannot remain at peace for long who does not strive to be the least important person in the community, attending to others with humility and love. You have come to serve, not to rule."[133] Had à Kempis and Bonhoeffer been contemporaries, they likely would have found a kindred spirit in the other. Bonhoeffer exhibited once again in this chapter the impact à Kempis had on him.

Stephen Nichols has rightly pointed out that Bonhoeffer puts the proclamation of the Word and any exercise of authority as coming after all the other forms of service in a Christian community.[134] Nichols has also pointed out that Bonhoeffer's order of services in a Christian community is derivative of Martin Luther's *The Freedom of a*

---

[131]*DBWE*, 5:95.

[132]*DBWE*, 5:96.

[133]à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, 17.

[134]Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life*, 73.

Christian.[135] In this work, Luther stated,

> Although individual Christians are thereby free from all works, they should nevertheless once again "humble themselves" in this freedom, take on "the form of a servant," "be made in human form and found in human vesture," and serve, help, and do everything for their neighbor, just as they see God has done and does with them through Christ. And they should do this freely, having regard for nothing except divine approval.[136]

Luther rooted the service a Christian renders to another in Christ's justifying grace. This is why Bonhoeffer's framework in this chapter of *LT* is so analogous to Luther. Bonhoeffer stated, "Self-justification and judging belong together in the same way that justification by grace and serving belong together."[137] As Nichols described, "Bonhoeffer stresses the need for authentic Christian living before the action of proclamation."[138] Such an approach to service in a Christian community, contrary to many contemporary whims of spirituality, is decidedly biblical and Christlike.

Summary of Chapter 5: Confession and the Lord's Supper

The final chapter of *LT* deals with the practice of confession in the Christian community as well as the Lord's Supper. Bonhoeffer called Christians in community to confess their sins. Allowing oneself to stay mired in sin is like leaving treatable cancer untreated. Christians could go through all of the motions of worship in community, in private, and in service to one another, but still remain alone in their sin. In doing this, Christians neglect the grace of Christ offered to them in and through others in the community. Bonhoeffer referred to the authority Jesus gave to the church to uphold the practice of confession: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you

---

[135]Stephen J. Nichols, report on thesis to author, March 6, 2018.

[136]Martin Luther, *The Annotated Luther*, vol. 1, *The Roots of Reform*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 522–23.

[137]*DBWE*, 5:94.

[138]Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life*, 73.

withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" (John 20:23 NRSV).[139]

Bonhoeffer made staggering statements about the importance of confession to other Christians. Based on the authority Jesus gave to the church, believers come to one another in confession and receive God's grace. "Now each stands in Christ's place."[140] Such a declaration is the result of Bonhoeffer's Christology, wherein the Christian finds Christ in the other. He is even clearer when he said, "When I go to another believer to confess, I am going to God."[141] When the Christian community is obedient to this call for confession, Bonhoeffer suggested that the congregation experiences a number of breakthroughs.

The first breakthrough is to community. Purging the community of sin through confession allows true Christian community to thrive.[142] "Sin that has been spoken and confessed has lost all of its power."[143] The second breakthrough is to the cross. One could say that this happens by participating in Paul's words to the church in Philippi: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:10–11 NRSV). Confession affirms the cross and receives its finished work.[144] The third breakthrough is to new life. Confession affords a return to the new life the Christian received through faith in Jesus.[145] The fourth breakthrough is to assurance. After confession, the Christian receives the pardoning Word of Jesus through another Christian. For the sake of receiving this assurance, believers should confess specific sins, not

---

[139]*DBWE*, 5:108–9.

[140]*DBWE*, 5:109.

[141]*DBWE*, 5:109.

[142]*DBWE*, 5:110.

[143]*DBWE*, 5:110.

[144]*DBWE*, 5:111–12.

[145]*DBWE*, 5:112.

general admissions of sin. Bonhoeffer argued this provides opportunity for the assurance God can give through his Word.[146] Yet, in all of the blessings that come through confession, Bonhoeffer did not want to hold up confession as a law. He acknowledged that these breakthroughs may come to someone apart from confession to other believers and in their confession to God alone.[147]

Bonhoeffer made plain that in the practice of private confession only Christians can hear the confession of other Christians. However, those that hear confession must also submit themselves to confession. Also, those that confess have to keep the practice from being simply a work of piety.[148] "We can dare to enter the abyss of confession only on the basis of God's offer of grace, help, and forgiveness; only for the sake of the promise of absolution can we confess. Confession as a work is spiritual death; confession in answer to God's promise is life. The forgiveness of sins is alone the ground and goal of confession."[149] Confession leads to forgiveness and prepares the Christian to receive the Lord's Supper.

Believers are called to be reconciled to the Lord before they can come together to receive the sacrament. The Lord's Supper serves as a sort of pinnacle of Christian community for Bonhoeffer. The community is together preparing itself through the grace that Jesus provides in his Word to receive the sacrament together. It becomes the rallying point of the community, assembling together to receive what God has given the Church in Jesus Christ.[150]

> The community of the holy Lord's Supper is above all the fulfillment of Christian community. Just as the members of the community of faith are united in body and

---

[146]*DBWE*, 5:112–13.

[147]*DBWE*, 5:114.

[148]*DBWE*, 5:115–16.

[149]*DBWE*, 5:116.

[150]*DBWE*, 5:116–18.

> blood as the table of the Lord, so they will be together in eternity. Here the community has reached its goal. Here joy in Christ and Christ's community is complete. The life together of Christians under the Word has reached its fulfillment in the sacrament.[151]

Analysis of Chapter 5: Confession and the Lord's Supper

This final chapter served as a fitting end to such a work as *LT*. In many ways Bonhoeffer showed the outworking of a Christian community. There are wonderful truths presented in the grace of forgiveness through confession and elements of the community's *telos*. However, some of Bonhoeffer's claims regarding confession prove to be a great challenge to modern evangelical readers. Also, in a chapter including the topic of the Lord's Supper in the title, Bonhoeffer actually spent only two paragraphs on the sacrament. It seemed that he felt it more important to focus on confession in the Christian community. For Bonhoeffer, his thoughts on confession were rooted in Scripture and informed by his theological tradition.

Bonhoeffer began the chapter with the call to "confess your sins to one another" (Jas 5:16a NRSV).[152] However, the call to confession in the context of James' epistle follows a point about the sick and their need for prayer (Jas 5:14). James seems to be advocating confession and prayer in relation to illness. Yet, Bonhoeffer used the verse as many others would in the Lutheran tradition to support private confession.

Lutherans like Bonhoeffer experienced the pattern of confession and forgiveness in the liturgy of their corporate worship service. After a general confession of sin, the minister pronounced forgiveness over the congregation.[153] Additionally, the pattern for private confession and forgiveness is provided for Lutherans. After a Psalm reading that the confessor and the one confessing recites together, a confession of sins is

---

[151]*DBWE*, 5:118.

[152]*DBWE*, 5:108.

[153]*Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), 56.

made.[154] The confessor asks the one whom has just confessed, "Do you believe that the word of forgiveness I speak to you comes from God himself?"[155] The confessor then speaks words of forgiveness to the one who has confessed.[156] Martin Luther himself advocated for such confession and forgiveness in a Christian community in his *Large Catechism*, specifically in the section on the Apostle's Creed. "Here there is full forgiveness of sins, both in that God forgives us and that we forgive, bear with, and aid one another."[157] Bonhoeffer's advice concerning confession of sin thus stemmed from his desire to be faithful to Luther and the Lutheran tradition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, though a short book, *LT* is full of theological meat and biblical spirituality. Knowing the background and context of Bonhoeffer helps the reader of *LT* to see the man himself coming out of the pages of the book. A work like *LT* displays its richness in that it was not mere speculation nor theory, but a lived book. Bonhoeffer sought to live out what he wrote about. Even Bonhoeffer's friend and mentor Karl Barth, who did not like the spirituality coming from Finkenwalde, could not accuse Bonhoeffer of not being true to his principles. For this reason, *LT* remains a testament to Bonhoeffer's spiritual integrity and a call to authentic Christian community.

---

[154]*Lutheran Book of Worship*, 196–97.

[155]*Lutheran Book of Worship*, 197.

[156]*Lutheran Book of Worship*, 197.

[157]Martin Luther, *The Annotated Luther*, vol. 2, *Word and Faith*, ed. Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 363.

CHAPTER 5

BONHOEFFER'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEME OF COMMUNITY BEFORE *LIFE TOGETHER*

Bonhoeffer's interest in the theme of community in *LT* is evident in his early theological writing and university lecturing. As his biography and the historical context surrounding *LT* have shown, Bonhoeffer's theology was developed as he was being shaped by the world around him. Yet, the central factor responsible for his formation was the Word of God. As with any other person, his historical, cultural, geographical, socio-economical, and political contexts were important elements in his growth. Nevertheless, it was the Word of God empowered by the Holy Spirit that worked within Bonhoeffer's heart and mind.

This chapter will focus on Bonhoeffer's development of his theology of community. It will begin by looking at some early themes present in *SC* that display the germ of what will blossom in *LT*. It will then trace these themes through two important series of lectures that Bonhoeffer delivered at the University of Berlin during his time there. These themes will then be balanced with core themes in *LT* to show how they matured from abstract lecture topics to lived doctrine. Finally, the biblical faithfulness of Bonhoeffer's core themes of community, fully expressed in *LT*, will be measured.

Foundations in *Sanctorum Communio*

A theologian must start somewhere. For Bonhoeffer, that beginning was with his work on *SC*. Clifford Green plainly stated that Bonhoeffer's theology cannot be properly understood without having a grasp of *SC*.[1] Such a statement displays the

[1] *DBWE*, 1:1.

profound importance of this work. It is noteworthy Bonhoeffer began his writing career with the doctrine of the Church.

Of his methodology in *SC*, Bonhoeffer noted, "In this study social philosophy and sociology are employed in the service of theology. Only through such an approach, it appears, can we gain a systematic understanding of the community-structure of the Christian church."[2]

> Not surprisingly, his effort provoked much criticism. Sociologists pointed to the skewed way of reading contemporary sociological texts. The objective work of the social sciences cannot be achieved in light of the specious presupposition of the Christian community. Moreover, while liberal theologians were uncomfortable with the confessional nature of the study, many neoorthodox theologians puzzled over the sociological and philosophical jargon. Yet after reading the published text Barth himself called it nothing less than a "theological miracle." What must have seemed impressive to him was the audacity of the twenty-one-year-old graduate student to integrate almost every aspect of his theological training, as well as much of what was currently fashionable in German and Swiss philosophy circles, into the basic fact of God's self-witness in Jesus Christ. (Barth was also pleasantly surprised that the work came out of the "school of Seeberg").[3]

Bonhoeffer's supervisor for the dissertation, Reinhold Seeberg, summarized his student's achievement and promise:

> The author is not only well oriented in the discipline of theology, but also has worked his way intelligently into the field of sociology. He clearly possesses a great gift for systematic thinking, as demonstrated by the dialectics in the structure of his thesis as a whole, and in its detail. He is concerned to find his way independently, and is always prepared to offer skillful counter-arguments to the opinions of others. Even though one might not always be able to concur with his judgments, one will readily recognize the scholar's interest and the energy of his argumentation.[4]

This independence is very evident not only in *SC*, but in his later ecclesiology in *LT*.

In the text itself, he began by defining some terms important to the methodology of proving his thesis.[5] Then he sought to explain the Christian concept of

---

[2]*DBWE*, 1:21.

[3]Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 68.

[4]*DBWE*, 1:7–8.

[5]*DBWE*, 1:24–33.

personhood: "For Christian philosophy, the human person originates only in relation to the divine; the divine person transcends the human person, who both resists and is overwhelmed by the divine."[6] In other words, human beings get their personhood because of the existence of God. Or as Stephen Nichols described Bonhoeffer's point, "Community with God and social community define personhood."[7] In this argumentation, Bonhoeffer is harnessing a dichotomy he will use in *LT*, namely the "*I-Thou*" relationship, commonly associated with Martin Buber. Bonhoeffer argued that "for the individual to exist, 'others' must necessarily be there."[8] Buber himself stated, "Through the *Thou* a man becomes *I*."[9] Clifford Green did not consider Bonhoeffer's position to be in line with Buber's and thought that Bonhoeffer went beyond Buber.[10] However, Steven Bezner argued rightly that Bonhoeffer at least built upon Buber's concept and work, especially since it is so close to Buber's own argument.[11] Bonhoeffer used the "*I-Thou*" relationship to describe how personhood, viewed from a Christian perspective, necessitates a social dynamic. "Consequently, in some way the individual belongs essentially and absolutely with the other, according to God's will, even though, or precisely because, the one is completely separate from the other."[12]

The next two chapters of *SC* deal with sociological aspects of community and how sin breaks community. It is in the latter of the two chapters that Bonhoeffer began to

---

[6]*DBWE*, 1:49.

[7]Stephen J. Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life: From the Cross, For the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 61.

[8]*DBWE*, 1:51.

[9]Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 28.

[10]Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 29–30.

[11]Steven M. Bezner, "Understanding the World Better Than It Understands Itself: The Theological Hermeneutics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer" (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2008), 39n26.

[12]*DBWE*, 1:56.

frame the foundational concept in *SC* that runs through Bonhoeffer's thinking about the church. All humanity in Adam, as Paul described in Romans 5, is interconnected underneath the headship of Adam. Bonhoeffer argued, "The structure of humanity-in-Adam is unique because it is both composed of many isolated individuals and yet is one, as the humanity that has sinned as a whole."[13] Bonhoeffer described this grouping of people underneath of Adam as a collective person.[14] "It is 'Adam', a collective person, who can only be superseded by the collective person 'Christ existing as church-community."[15] With this statement, through his development of the two notions of person and collective person, Bonhoeffer described the relationship of Christ and the church, which is Christ existing as church-community. The church is Christ's collective person.

Bonhoeffer's development of this phrase was a stroke of genius. He entered into the context of theological and philosophical thought of his time and reconstructed an existing idea asserted by Georg W. F. Hegel, a German philosopher who subscribed to idealism. For Hegel, the way to think about the world was through dialectic or through negation, pursuing truth by sifting through opposing sides of a particular topic.[16] Hegel argued for a rather radical position on the Godhead, as Peter Hodgson explained, "The Trinity is a play of spiritual relationships by which God is God. "Father" is not a divine person but a symbol designating the immanent Trinity, while "Son" is a symbol designating the economic or worldly Trinity, and "Spirit" is a symbol designating the inclusive or holistic Trinity."[17] Hegel's perspective, though woefully unfaithful to

---

[13]*DBWE*, 1:121.

[14]*DBWE*, 1:118.

[15]*DBWE*, 1:121.

[16]John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 270–72.

[17]Peter C. Hodgson, "Hegel's Philosophy of Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 247.

Scripture, gave rise to an emphasis on the Spirit of God and particularly how his Trinitarian point-of-view impacted Christian community. As Hodgson explained Hegel's view of Christian community,

> Human subjectivity, when it is transfigured by the indwelling of the Spirit of God, becomes a communal subjectivity, an intersubjectivity in which external distinctions and social rankings are abolished. In the presence of God all human beings are free and equal. Their relationships are based not on attraction or personal fulfillment but on "the infinite love that comes from infinite anguish." The anguish, the shared suffering, creates a new kind of human fellowship in which persons find themselves only by losing themselves for the sake of others. Love in the fullest sense is compassion, suffering with and on behalf of others. It is grounded in the divine compassion revealed in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the power and reality of this love made subjectively present and actual in the life of the community.[18]

It is not hard to miss elements that exist in some of Bonhoeffer's approach to community. However, Bonhoeffer did not share the unorthodox doctrine of God held by Hegel. As Green argued, Bonhoeffer's phrase, Christ existing as church-community "is Bonhoeffer's Christological-social transformation of Hegel's phrase, "Gott als Gemeinde existierend."[19] Bonhoeffer redeemed a portion of Hegel's argumentation to suit his thesis and this phrase stuck in Bonhoeffer's writing. Mark Devine rightly balances Bonhoeffer's intent in crafting this phrase, "The point was neither to reduce Christ's or God's presence to its manifestations among Christians in fellowship nor to confine divine activity within the church. Rather, Bonhoeffer called for acknowledgement of the church as the sphere in which God is pleased to meet his children."[20] Furthermore, Jennifer McBride considered this phrase and the theological direction that followed to be perhaps Bonhoeffer's most important theological theme in all of his writing.[21] Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the church, first developed in *SC* and closely tied to this theologically pregnant phrase, was decidedly

---

[18]Hodgson, "Hegel's Philosophy of Religion," 251.

[19]Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 52n91.

[20]Mark Devine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at All Costs* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 74.

[21]Jennifer M. McBride, "Christ Existing as Concrete Community Today," *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (2014): 92–93.

Christological.

These elements of Christ existing as church-community and Christ as a collective person found their way into *LT*. As Bonhoeffer was describing the place of the Psalms in the Christian community's day together he said, "The Psalter is the vicarious prayer of Christ for his congregation. Now that Christ is with the Father, the new humanity in Christ—the body of Christ—on earth continues to pray his prayer to the end of time."[22] For Christ to pray the Psalms for the Christian community requires a special kind of action on his part for the community. Jesus acted as what Bonhoeffer called a vicarious representative or *Stellvertreter*.[23] In *SC*, Bonhoeffer grounded his description of Christ as vicarious representative in differentiating Adam and Christ's headship: "In the old humanity the whole of humanity falls anew, so to speak, with every person who sins; in Christ, however, humanity has been brought once and for all—this is essential to *real* vicarious representative action—into community with God."[24]

Andrew Root insightfully pointed out that while Bonhoeffer wrote *SC*, he was teaching a children's Sunday school class.[25] "As Bonhoeffer wrote about the concrete church, he was doing concrete ministry with children. Themes like *Stellvertretung* (place-sharing), objective spirit, and open/closed relationality may very well have had their creative origins, or at least gained energy, in his children's/youth ministry experience."[26] Instead of translating *Stellvertretung* or *Stellvertreter* as vicarious representative action, Root translated it as place-sharing, which he thought better captured the kind of advocate-

---

[22]*DBWE*, 5:55.

[23]Kelly, *DBWE*, 5:55n20.

[24]*DBWE*, 1:146.

[25]Andrew Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 42–43.

[26]Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 43.

like ministry that Jesus performed for his people.[27] Whether it is vicarious representative action or place-sharing, Bonhoeffer's intention of the Christian's duty in Christian community, centered in Christ, is evident. One can see how the early elements of what would materialize in *LT* were forged in *SC*. Bonhoeffer continued to develop these themes in his lectures at the university.

Developments in The Nature of the Church Lectures

The summer of 1932 found Bonhoeffer lecturing at the University of Berlin. The course that he taught was entitled "The Nature of the Church." It was an opportunity for Bonhoeffer to lecture on many of the themes he had developed in *SC*. These lectures were broken down into two main parts: The Place of the Church and The Form of the Church. The second part was predominantly an opportunity to wrestle with the concepts of Christ existing as church-community, Christ as a collective person, and Christ's vicarious representative action.[28]

Bethge gave insight to Bonhoeffer's approach to the class and how it was received by the students:

> Having established his theological standpoint, Bonhoeffer presented his first attempt at a lecture using the topic of his own starting point: the church. He announced two-hour lectures and, despite being a passionate late-sleeper, forced himself to begin teaching at eight o'clock in the morning. The lecture hall began to fill; people had expectations of both critique and concreteness.[29]

He began by defining what he meant by looking at the form of the church. "The church as a genuine form is unity, basically the unity of God! The form reveals itself under the presupposition of unity. . . . The church is primary unity. Those who do not start with

---

[27]Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 43–44n4.

[28]*DBWE*, 11:269–71.

[29]Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed., ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 213.

unity confuse the church with a religious community."[30] Knowing Bonhoeffer's emphasis on Christ as a collective person, one can see from these statements where Bonhoeffer was going in making claims about the form the church.

After he set up the representative action that Adam took on behalf of all people, Bonhoeffer moved on to the church and Christ. With an eye toward justification, Bonhoeffer declared, "One stands for all; Christ is the vicarious representative of humanity. Adam [stands] not in [the] place of the other but rather in his own. Christ stands [in] place of humanity!"[31] Bonhoeffer connected justification to Christ's vicarious representative action by walking through four vital elements of Christ's completion of his task: his incarnation, his active obedience, his death on the cross, and his resurrection.[32] What was unique about this is that Bonhoeffer spent a significant amount of time in these lectures on the church talking about Christ.

Bonhoeffer also explained the participation of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the church: "The Holy Spirit actualized that which has been realized through Christ."[33] As opposed to Hegel's approach to the Godhead's involvement in the church, Bonhoeffer was clearly biblical showing the Holy Spirit as that which binds the church together in Christ (Rom 8:9–11).[34] Such an orthodox view kept the church from being viewed as anything less than what God made it to be. "Church [is not to be understood] as a religious community! Church is [a] reality of faith. [An] ideal of experience, rather than [of] reality, [that] is religious community."[35] Bonhoeffer had clearly taken his initial

---

[30]*DBWE*, 11:292.

[31]*DBWE*, 11:296.

[32]*DBWE*, 11:297–98.

[33]*DBWE*, 11:305.

[34]*DBWE*, 11:306.

[35]*DBWE*, 11:307.

assertions in *SC* and not only stayed faithful to them but expanded on and applied them.

Further Refinements in the Christology Lectures

One year later in the summer semester of 1933, Bonhoeffer taught a course on Christology, for which he held a high view. As he stated, "Only scholarship that knows itself to be within the realm of the Christian church could agree here that Christology is the center of the realm of scholarship itself."[36] For many that would take Bonhoeffer's Christocentrism as dangerous to a proper confession of the Trinity, Dane Ortlund provides helpful counsel: "Christocentrism can happily co-exist with orthodox trinitarianism because (1) it is only through Christ that we know of the Trinity, and (2) the Trinity itself is Christ-centered. As we view the Trinity through Christ and Christ through the Trinity, we find orthodox trinitarianism and Christocentrism not only compatible but mutually reinforcing."[37] Therefore, Bonhoeffer's approach to Christology as central to theology is not cause for concern. Christology was the way by which he described the church, through Christ, and he upheld it as the central focus of the church.

A development of Bonhoeffer's proposition of Christ existing as church-community or as collective person, was expanded in these lectures. "The being of Christ's person is essentially relatedness to me. His being-Christ is his being-for-me. This pro-me is not to be understood as an effect that issues from Christ or as a form that he assumes incidentally, but is to be understood as the being of his very person. The very core of his person is pro-me."[38] This was not a great leap for Bonhoeffer to make, especially since he had established the concept of Christ's vicarious representative action for Christians. For Bonhoeffer, this meant that Christ is "for" his people. Clifford Green's

---

[36]*DBWE*, 12:301.

[37]Dane C. Ortlund, "Christocentrism: An Asymmetrical Trinitarianism?" *Themelios* 34, no. 3 (November 2009): 315.

[38]*DBWE*, 12:314.

words are helpful here,

> It is this view of Christ's being-for-humanity which informs all Bonhoeffer's treatment of the form of Christ's presence and his soteriological role as Mediator; as the freedom of the Mediator is his being for humanity (*pro nobis*), so his presence frees people for God and one another. . . . Christ is truly Christ and human beings are truly human in the sociality of Christ and humanity.[39]

Green's use of sociality instead of church stems from his belief that Bonhoeffer was not just focused on ecclesiology, but something broader, hence the use of sociality.[40] However, Bezner rightly disputes that while Green provides insight in this regard, it cannot be denied that Bonhoeffer's aim was that of ecclesiology as he tied together Christ and the Christian community.[41] Therefore, Christ in his person is for his church.

One additional element that came out of Bonhoeffer's Christology lectures not previously stated in *SC* or in his lectures on the church has to do with the way in which Christ exists as church-community. In the context of his explanation of this theme's impact on the sacrament, Bonhoeffer stated, "The concept of the body as applied to the church-community is not a functional concept referring to members but is instead a concept of the way in which the Christ exists who is present, exalted, and humiliated."[42] Bonhoeffer's words show the importance of keeping the cross as integral to the church's ongoing understanding of Christology. The words of H. Gaylon Barker are helpful in grasping Bonhoeffer's point: "Christ *pro me*, the humiliated and risen Christ existing as church-community, is the center of human existence. Standing between God and humanity, in fact standing in humanity's place before God, Christ stands at the center of the new humanity, at the center of human existence and history."[43] Bonhoeffer

---

[39]Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 235.

[40]Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 20–21.

[41]Bezner, "Understanding the World Better Than It Understands Itself," 36.

[42]*DBWE*, 12:323.

[43]H. Gaylon Barker, *The Cross of Reality: Luther's Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 240.

provocatively picked up this point later in his lectures: "That Christ is the Messiah cannot be proven; he can only be proclaimed. This statement means that in Christ the messianic expectation of history is crushed as well as fulfilled. It is crushed because its fulfillment is hidden. It is fulfilled because the Messiah has truly come. . . . History finds its meaning in the humiliation of Christ."[44] Such truth enriches Bonhoeffer's elaboration of Christian community and its purposes and constitution. These Christological developments led to that which was lived and taught at Finkenwalde.

Major Themes in *Life Together*

As has been shown, *LT* is a book rich with content despite its length. One could spend a great deal of time discussing its various emphases and theological points. For the thesis at hand, there are a few salient points to note. These points or themes are woven throughout Bonhoeffer's writings as far back as *SC*. Though these themes were not identical in *SC* or in his university lectures, their foundations were constructed in these earlier works.

These core themes in *LT* are focused on two key theological areas: Christ and the church. Though *LT*'s description of Christian community was penned in the context of a seminary, when it is put within the overall context of Bonhoeffer's body of work, it becomes clear that his convictions regarding community are primarily ecclesial. This is a point that Steven Bezner similarly makes in his dissertation on Bonhoeffer. He said, "the church is the concrete representation of Bonhoeffer's theology."[45] This thesis is in complete agreement with that argument. Therefore, it is helpful to weigh Bonhoeffer's claims about community in light of the church.

The first theme to mention is unpacked from the following statement,

---

[44]*DBWE*, 12:325.

[45]Bezner, "Understanding the World Better Than It Understands Itself," 9.

"Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ."[46] The prepositions in that statement exemplify its main thrust. Christian community is emphatically Christocentric. Yet it is more than that, for the Christian community to be *through* Christ means that Jesus is the creator of the community. Any community that is not *through* Christ is not Christian community. By being *in* Christ, the Christian community in Christ reflects the doctrine of the union with Christ. Bonhoeffer's Lutheran framework inhibited him from using the specific phrase "union with Christ," as was more common in the Reformed tradition. Yet, Steven Paulson makes the case that Luther's view of the *communicatio idiomatum* regarding the two natures of Christ sets the path for Lutherans, like Bonhoeffer, to articulate what it means to be in union with Christ.[47] J. V. Fesko asserts that a Lutheran take on union with Christ also had much to do with justification: "Melanchthon held that believers were indwelled by Christ and therefore in union with him. But like Luther before him, he wanted to ensure that the ground for the believer's acceptance before the divine bar was found solely in Christ and his obedience."[48] Therefore, Bonhoeffer described a theology of Christian community grounded in the doctrine of union with Christ, which upholds Christ as the creator of such community and the one in whom it is sustained.

The second theme is rooted in another statement from Bonhoeffer, "Christian community is not an ideal, but a divine reality."[49] This proposition displays a combination of theological and practical thinking regarding community. Part of the genius Bonhoeffer displayed in *LT* is the ability to oscillate between theological

---

[46]*DBWE*, 5:31.

[47]Steven D. Paulson, "Christology," in *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 142–45.

[48]J. V. Fesko, "Union with Christ," in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 430.

[49]*DBWE*, 5:35.

foundations and practical applications. This statement is an excellent example. The second half of the statement builds off the earlier argument that Christian community is through Christ or namely that Jesus is its creator. For community to be a divine reality implies that it is not a human product or creation. It is created by God before humans have anything to do with it. This is in line with God's salvific work in which he gives his love and grace. Such are all divine realities before they are human realities. Though people may desire community and even consider it an ideal to be striven for, Christian community is in fact not found in human desire or ideal but is given in the divine reality. This has all kinds of practical implications for a Christian community, but the greatest is to refrain from making desires and ideals for community the driving force of the community. Bonhoeffer emphatically stated, "Because God has already laid the only foundation of our community, because God has united us in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that life together with other Christians, not as those who make demands, but as those who thankfully receive."[50] Since Christian community, like salvation, belongs to the Lord and it is the Lord that has made it, Christians receive and participate in this community.

A third theme is found in Bonhoeffer's assertion that "Christian community is a spiritual and not a psychic reality."[51] Bonhoeffer has already said that Christian community is through Christ, thus making him its creator. He has also stated that Christian community is a divine reality, that is, something that God has done in advance or has done prior to any human activity or cooperation. Bonhoeffer explained, "It means . . . that from eternity we have been chosen in Jesus Christ, accepted in time, and united for eternity."[52] Bonhoeffer roots Christian community in election, pointing to

---

[50]*DBWE*, 5:36.

[51]*DBWE*, 5:35.

[52]*DBWE*, 5:31.

God's sovereign decree of salvation through Christ to be applied by the Holy Spirit. Geffrey Kelly explained Bonhoeffer's contrast between spiritual and psychic as being similar to Paul's distinction between spirit and flesh.[53] This is then a further argument against man's actions in the creation of Christian community. Yet, it is also simultaneously a statement about the Holy Spirit's involvement in the Christian community as well as the spiritual nature of Christian community. Looking back to Bonhoeffer's description of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in Christian community in *SC*, Charles Marsh helpfully explained, "The Holy Spirit dwelling in the church is actualized by revelation in Christ; therefore the Spirit does not reside independently of the church."[54] Shortly thereafter, Marsh stated Bonhoeffer's position even more succinctly, "Pneumatology is based strictly on christology."[55] Thus, the spiritual nature of Christian community is founded on Christ being the center and giving his Spirit to the community.

Woven through the three of these themes are some central aspects of Christ and the church. Bonhoeffer was not satisfied to merely say that Christian community is Christ-centered. Such a statement, while true, could be ambiguous and leave room for interpretation. Bonhoeffer desired to be clear about Christ's exact role as the center of Christian community. Nor was the Christian community merely some kind of organic, extra-ecclesial group. For Bonhoeffer, the Christian community was the church. In grasping Bonhoeffer's theology, Christ and the church cannot be separated. As Bezner argued, "Bonhoeffer's Christology, while extremely important, cannot be understood apart from his ecclesiology."[56] The marriage of these two themes served as the way by

---

[53]Kelly, *DBWE*, 5:35n12.

[54]Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 73.

[55]Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 74.

[56]Bezner, "Understanding the World Better Than It Understands Itself," 9.

which Bonhoeffer read the Scriptures.[57] Therefore, it is to the Scriptures that one must next turn to test Bonhoeffer's core themes.

Biblical Assessment of Bonhoeffer's Community

In order to analyze Bonhoeffer's core themes regarding community, I will look at three sections of the New Testament: the Pauline Epistles, the General Epistles, and the Gospels and Acts. These portions of Scripture speak most directly to the theme of Christian community or more specifically, the church, as Bonhoeffer deals with it. In the previous chapter of this thesis, *LT* was summarized and many of Bonhoeffer's references to Scripture explained. Therefore, this discussion will not be so much a survey of Bonhoeffer's proof texts, but a biblical assessment of Bonhoeffer's themes of community developed in *LT*. Nevertheless, Mark Devine aptly affirmed Bonhoeffer's biblical fidelity:

> Bonhoeffer would press questions upon the Bible and expect to find answers there. What he found was a God determined to have a people, not a person, for himself. This God came to earth in Jesus Christ not to make Christians only but a church especially. Still within this communal framework for understanding Christian reality, the individual remained important and unique.[58]

Therefore, a biblical testing of Bonhoeffer's theological convictions about community will show his devotion thereto.

In each section of Scripture below, the verses and passages referenced fit into one or more of four distinct subjects. The first is belonging, namely, descriptions of Christians belonging to Christ, to God, and to one another. Scriptures under this subject have direct connections to Bonhoeffer's argument that Christian community is through and in Jesus Christ. The second is God as creator, particularly upholding Jesus as the creator and sustainer of all things, but specifically the church. These Scriptures highlight

---

[57]Bezner, "Understanding the World Better Than It Understands Itself," 9.

[58]Devine, *Bonhoeffer Speaks* Today, 75.

Bonhoeffer's point that Christian community is a divine reality. The third is temple, where the church is shown to be a new temple for God's indwelling. These Scriptures support Bonhoeffer's emphasis that Christian community is a spiritual reality. The fourth is body, namely, descriptions of the body of Christ. The Scriptures under this subject also support Bonhoeffer's point that Christian community is through and in Jesus Christ.

Pauline Epistles

The Pauline corpus is thick with references to the church. Beginning with the subject of belonging, it will be evident this was an important point for Paul to make. "Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God" (Rom 7:4 ESV).[59] Through the death of Christ, Paul stated, Christians have died to the law and are no longer bound to it as they were before (Rom 7:1–3). They no longer belong to the law, but now to Christ. Though this is true individually for every believer, it is also true corporately for all believers: together, they all belong to Christ. Paul thus wrote to the church in Corinth: "and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:23). Paul pointed to a compounded belonging here: Christians belong to Christ and Christ belongs to the Father.

Earlier in the same letter to Corinth, Paul discussed this corporate belonging: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Cor 1:2). The church in Corinth, like every other church, was called to be saints together with all other believers in Christ. Paul has in view a corporate belonging to Christ of all believers. As Gordon Fee rightly put it, "In the new people that God is creating for himself in the coming age that has already dawned, the

[59]Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture references for the remainder of the chapter will be from the ESV.

Corinthians have a share with all the saints, fellow believers "in every place" who also "call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," that is, who have put their trust in him and pray to and worship him."[60]

Christians have a share with fellow believers, because of their fellowship with Jesus. "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). "The calling *to* Christ is a calling to be *in fellowship with* Christ through the Spirit."[61] Christians' fellowship with Jesus is a spiritual one in which all believers share together. "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom 8:16–17). Paul made a similar statement to the church in Galatia:

> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:26–29)

In the words of Thomas Schreiner, "The inheritance becomes a reality through union with Christ, the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). Those who are united with Christ share in the inheritance that he has gained for them."[62] This has clear connections to Bonhoeffer's emphasis that Christians are united in community in and through Christ. Biblically, this is visible through the fellowship believers share with Christ and subsequently with one another.

The letter to the Ephesians is loaded with each of the four aforementioned subjects, but particularly with language that fits the sense of belonging. Paul argued that in revealing the gospel "which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making

---

[60]Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 33.

[61]Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 45.

[62]Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 428.

known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:8–10). The notion of uniting all things in Christ again fits very strongly with Bonhoeffer's depiction of Christian community being in Christ. Clinton Arnold disagreed with the common translation of ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι in Ephesians 1:10: "Because the "headship" of Christ over all things is so prominent in this letter, it is likely that the readers would have read this term in light of those statements."[63] Changing the depiction to headship does not take away this verse's value in supporting the themes of community Bonhoeffer presented. There is still an "in Christ" in Ephesians 1:9 and 1:10 that upholds the nature of community Bonhoeffer portrays. Additionally, the headship of Christ supports the notion of Christian community being through Christ, namely that the community formed by Christ is being brought under his headship.

In relation to Bonhoeffer's point regarding community being a divine reality, Paul declared that Christ has saved believers "and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6). "Believers are made alive through a dynamic union with Christ, which has enabled them to participate in the benefits of Christ's resurrection and exaltation."[64] As Andrew Lincoln commented on this verse, "Believers are seen as included in Christ, so what God accomplished for Christ he accomplished for him as the representative, the head of a new humanity."[65] Lincoln's comments bring together the importance of union with Christ and the headship of Christ in this passage. This inclusion with Christ, which Paul announced as a present reality for Christians, again recalls Bonhoeffer's notion of community being a divine and spiritual reality as well as Christian community being in Christ.

---

[63]Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 89.

[64]Arnold, *Ephesians*, 136.

[65]Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 105.

A final portion of Scriptures in Paul's writings related to the subject of belonging are focused on the life of the believer. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21). One can readily understand Paul's statement that dying is gain for the Christian, but the affirmation that living *is* Christ is at first sight an odd affirmation. Paul expanded on this notion of the life of believers being bound up with Christ in other texts: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:3–4). Similar to Paul's statement about death in Romans 7:4, something new happens to the life of believers once they have died with Christ. When Paul wrote this to the church in Colossae, he was reminding them that their lives, both individually and corporately, were caught up in Christ and they would together appear with Christ in glory. Similarly, Paul explained that Jesus "who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him" (1 Thess 5:10).

Another subject prominent in Paul's letters is that of the body of Christ. Craig Nessan made the point that Bonhoeffer's description of the Church as a collective person fits neatly with Paul's depiction of the church as the body of Christ.[66] "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom 12:4–5). He said an almost identical statement in his first letter to Corinth: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). The commonality in both passages is that believers form the body of Christ. Such language related to the body has in view a picture that shows the church as connected to one another and to Christ. He used a similar depiction of the church in numerous other verses (see 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:12, 16; Eph

[66]Craig L. Nessan, "What If the Church Really Is the Body of Christ?" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 44.

5:30, Col 1:24; Col 3:15). In that sense, collective person seemed to have been Bonhoeffer's way of describing what it meant to call the church the body of Christ. In Colossians 1:18, Paul tied together the theme of the headship of Christ and the body imagery: "And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent" (Col 1:18). David Pao's comments on the verse are apropos:

> First, by identifying the head of the church as the one who is also supreme over all creation, Paul is affirming that the church holds a crucial position in the redemptive plan of God. Salvation can be found in the gospel that the church preaches, and the church becomes the context through which God's redemptive act can be fulfilled. Second, since Christ is the head of the church, the church takes on the mediatorial role through which one can approach God.[67]

The body imagery that Paul used of the church is on par with Bonhoeffer's depiction of Christian community. Also, the link of Christ's headship with the body imagery further solidifies the centrality of Christ in Christian community.

The next subject of Scripture references revolves around Christ as creator and sustainer. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom 11:36). In all that Paul expounded on in Romans 11, his way of wrapping things up was to glory in the power and might of God. "God is the source of all things, the means by which all things are accomplished, and the goal of all things."[68] Paul said something very similar to the Colossians, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16–17). Central to all things is the church, such that Bonhoeffer seemed to have been thinking along the lines of Romans 11:36 and Colossians 1:16–17 when he described Christian community being through and in Jesus

---

[67]David W. Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, ZECNT 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 100.

[68]Schreiner, *Romans*, 637–38.

Christ. Again, in Paul's first letter to Timothy, he wrote about the church in two places and distinctly refers to the church as belonging to God (1 Tim 3:5, 15). Since Bonhoeffer referred to Christian community as a divine reality, thus making it God's possession, he was in line with Paul's comments about the church.

The final portion of Scriptures in Paul's letters are related to the subject of the church being a temple for the Lord. Paul referred to the church as God's temple in various places in both letters to the Corinthians (see 1 Cor 3:9, 16; 2 Cor 6:16). However, the most extensive reference he makes to the church as a temple is in his letter to the Ephesians. This particular passage is relevant to several of the other subjects previously discussed but is most clearly about presenting the church as a temple:

> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph 2:13–22)

Many of the themes present in the previous passages from Paul are evident here in this Ephesians text. Through the death of Christ, believers are now united in him. That unity in Christ is made possible by the Spirit. All those who are united in Christ are fellow beneficiaries of the blessings that belong to Christ. However, what is new in this passage in relation to other passages is the dwelling place described in Ephesians 2:22. "Paul concludes this section about the nature of the church by affirming that God dwells in their midst. The "nearness" (ἐγγύς) to God Paul describes in the central statement of this passage is now expressed in different terms. Paul says that by union with Christ,

redeemed people form a corporate body that is the dwelling place of God."[69] This corporate body formed in union with Christ is precisely what Bonhoeffer described as Christian community. Andrew Lincoln's thoughts on this passage seem to be right from Bonhoeffer himself,

> Such reflections are designed to lead the readers to a renewed appreciation of, and gratitude for, the powerful nature of Christ's reconciling work, but for which they would have remained without God and without hope in the world. They are designed to give them an incentive to become what they already are as the community where divisions have been healed and God's presence is made known in the world.[70]

A community becoming what it already is in Christ would be precisely how Bonhoeffer would have described the church. Bonhoeffer was clearly in line with theology of community described in the Pauline corpus.

General Epistles

The General Epistles do not contain as many references to Christ and his relationship to the church as do the letters of Paul, nevertheless there are some. The primary subject to which the General Epistles refer is that of belonging. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet 2:9–10). At the heart of this text is the notion that Christians were once without all the blessings derivative of being in Christ. This is clear throughout Paul's letters and at the core of Bonhoeffer's argument that God has created the Christian community. Additionally, just as Paul emphasizes fellowship with Christ, John highlighted the same things:

---

[69]Arnold, *Ephesians*, 173.

[70]Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 165.

> That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. . . . If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:3, 6–7)

What is common to these verses from John's first letter is the combination of fellowship with Christ and the fellowship of believers. They are inextricably linked. "Persons who cut themselves off from fellowship with other Christians cannot have fellowship with God. But if they are prepared to live by God's light, they will come into fellowship with them and with God himself."[71] Having fellowship with Christians and with God is the norm of the Christian life.

John encouraged his readers to abide in God but highlighted how God abides in them: "Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us" (1 John 3:24). Just as Bonhoeffer argued that Christian community is a spiritual reality, John explained that assurance of the mutual indwelling of God in believers and vice versa comes by the Spirit.[72] This mutual indwelling is also evidenced through love, "No one has even seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:12).

There are just a couple references to the Church as a temple in the General Epistles. "But Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope" (Heb 3:6). Similar to John's statements that obedience and love established the mutual indwelling between God and Christians, the writer to the Hebrews stated that confidence and boasting in the hope of the gospel confirmed Christians' participation in God's house. Peter, along the

---

[71]I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 111–12.

[72]Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 143.

same lines, described this spiritual temple as being made to be in Christ, "You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5). It is noteworthy that Peter's description is nearly identical to Paul's in Ephesians.

The Gospels and Acts

The Gospels and Acts also have various passages that uphold Bonhoeffer's themes of community in *LT*. "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)" (Matt 1:23). God being with his people is the essence of Christian community. Without Christ, there is no Christian community. "For where two or three or gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt 16:18). The context of this verse deals with church discipline to be sure, but the truth of God's presence with his people is equally made plain. God is committed to being with his people. Trust in God and obedience to his commands is the path towards being in his family, as was described in 1 John and in Paul's writing. "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt 12:50). Jesus embodies the promise of belonging for Christians.

Jesus prayed for believers "that they may all be one, just as you Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me" (John 17:21–23). Union with Christ and with the Father was at the heart of that for which Jesus prayed for believers. Leon Morris stated that union with Christ has a purpose: "It looks for the disciples to be "brought to complete unity." They already had a unity of sort. But this unity is not regarded as being sufficient. There is be a closer unity, a "perfected"

unity. As in verse 21 the unity of believers is to impress the world."[73] The Lord displays his commitment to this unity in how his power over the church as creator is displayed.

Earlier in Jesus' prayer in John 17, he prayed: "All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them" (John 17:10). As Morris commented, "What belongs to the One belongs to the Other. "All you have is mine" goes beyond "all I have is yours." This latter expression might perhaps be used by any creature, but "all you have is mine" points to a very special relationship."[74] It is in that special relationship with the Father that Jesus claims ownership and control over his church. After all, Jesus said, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18). In all that can be said about that verse, one thing is abundantly clear, Jesus will build his church. It is "his" church to build. Similar to Paul's words in Romans 11:36 and Colossians 1:16–17, John declared of Jesus, "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3). Morris beautifully stated, "What we see around us did not come into existence apart from the Word, any more than what appeared on the first day of creation."[75] Thus one can confidently say that without Christ the church was not made.

As the early church was springing up, the same displays of the Lord's power and control over its creation were evident. Luke recorded that the church was "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). It was the Lord adding to the number of the church, just as the Lord continues to do and will do as he builds his church. Yet again, Bonhoeffer's declaration that Christian community is a divine reality is wonderfully upheld. As the early church was growing, persecution met it at every step. For a time,

---

[73]Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 650–51.

[74]Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 642.

[75]Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 71.

Saul of Tarsus was at the tip of the spear directed at the growing community of Christians. When Jesus encountered Saul on the road to Damascus, he asked, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). The significance of this is found in the Lord's identification with his church. As they were persecuted, he was persecuted. As his body, his temple, his collection of saints united to him in this mysterious spiritual reality was enduring hardship, he was there with and in them. Christian community is *through* and *in* Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Bonhoeffer's theology of community in *LT* was developed from the time of *SC* and his university lectures. By placing Christology at the center of his explanation of the church, he upheld Christ's place of preeminence amongst the Christian community. Jesus is not an addition to a Christian community; he constitutes its very being. Christian community is through and in Jesus Christ, because Christ exists as the church-community. Christian community is no mere human ideal, but something that God has sovereignly created in Christ. Christian community is founded in Christ and upheld by the Holy Spirit. These truths are not only deeply rich, they are deeply biblical. As the New Testament describes the church, it paints a picture with which Bonhoeffer was clearly familiar.

CHAPTER 6

A CONCLUDING WORD—RETRIEVING BONHOEFFER'S VISION

Bonhoeffer wrote in the preface to *LT*: "The subject matter I am presenting here is such that any further development can take place only through a common effort. We are not dealing with a concern of some private circles but with a mission entrusted to the church."[1] In detailing where *LT* was to be worked out, discussed, and applied, Bonhoeffer placed the emphasis on the church. The book, as has been shown, has implications and applications in other spheres of Christian life, yet it seems its true home is the church. Ignoring this intentionally misses Bonhoeffer's intent.

Bonhoeffer's heart was always fixed on the church. From writing *SC*, teaching Sunday school, pursuing pastoral work, training pastors, and then finishing his life imprisoned and yearning for the church, the body of Christ was clearly central to his life and thinking. Yet, as has also been shown, Bonhoeffer was not naïve regarding the dynamics of life in the church. Much like today, there were real threats to healthy churches, both in belief and practice. In spite of this, Bonhoeffer courageously pursued orthodoxy in his ecclesiology. The path he trod was one that lifted high the importance of Christology in understanding the church. His path also rested firmly on the Scriptures, relying on God's revelation to define and describe Christian community and the practices thereof.

Christian Community Redefined

To be sure, there is no need to redefine Christian community. In other words,

---

[1]*DBWE*, 5:25.

there is no need to redefine what Christian community is supposed to be. The Scriptures are clear about the contours of true Christian community, which can be discovered by proper exegesis and application.

Even before the rise of the Nazi government in Germany, Bonhoeffer was faced with various trends attempting to twist and contort the Christian faith to match the world around him. Though Bonhoeffer learned from and identified with portions of both Protestant liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, he forged his own path. That path became increasingly informed by the Scriptures. The rise of the Nazi government and its subsequent impact on German churches provided challenges that went beyond intramural theological debates and branched out into every facet of life. Bonhoeffer had to continue his project of redefining Christian community over and against imposing cultural narratives. He had started that project in his earliest work in *SC*, but over time, it became less theoretical and more lived.

Every culture and age must take the unchanging Scriptures and apply them. Thus, when Bonhoeffer needed to understand and help others around him understand what it meant to be part of a faithful Christian community in his time, he turned to that which does not change. He turned to the Bible. He also saw that those who had gone before him had done the same. In *LT* for example, he quoted Martin Luther numerous times. He did not do so from a mere academic standpoint, but from a desire to root his thesis in *LT* in the tradition in which men like Luther stood. Yet, even as he rooted himself in the tradition of Luther, he engaged with others, even his contemporaries, to capture those things which needed to be held onto for faithful Christian practice. Furthermore, the tradition in which he rooted himself—with Luther as an example—was itself rooted in the Scriptures. Bonhoeffer's own work, particularly in *LT*, was one of recovering or retrieving the good deposit given to all the saints for all time. *LT* did not redefine Christian community from an historical perspective; it recovered it. It seemed radical and new because things in the church had gotten so far off course, especially in

Germany at that time. Thus, the only redefinition needed for Christian community is one that releases it from cultural or worldly impulses and puts it back under the authority of the unchanging Word.

The Task of Retrieval

"The church's work of sanctified reason takes shape in the middle of particular cultures, times and communities."[2] In the context of Bonhoeffer's Germany, the way forward was by turning back. This is precisely how and why *LT* can be so valuable to the contemporary Church. W. David Buschart and Kent Eilers defined retrieval as "a *mode or style of theological discernment* that looks back in order to move forward."[3] Therefore, *LT* should become part of a tradition that the modern Church uses to learn how to do and be the Church. Michael Allen and Scott Swain have argued, "One cannot make real progress in the quest for understanding apart from a tradition."[4] Allen and Swain went on from that point and argued that this in fact is what Christians have always done, even within the confines of Scripture itself.[5] Buschart and Eilers agree, and stated that in the epistles of the Apostle Paul "passing on the traditions of worship, behavior and belief were fundamental to the formation of Christian identity."[6] Similarly Rowan Williams has stated,

> Churches have always been "conserving" communities: that is, they have always been concerned about the past and about whether they were in some sense doing the same thing as the previous generation had done. . . . The Christian Church has the added concern of making sure those habits are a way of *bringing believers truthfully and effectively in the presence of a specific past, the incarnate reality of Jesus*. What

---

[2]W. David Buschart and Kent D. Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 11.

[3]Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 12.

[4]Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 20.

[5]Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 21.

[6]Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 16.

> the Church conserves is seen as important because this concept of becoming contemporary with Jesus. . . . Without this encounter with Jesus in the days of his flesh and in his life in his corporate Body in history, the believing self remains untouched by transforming grace.[7]

Taking into consideration Bonhoeffer's statement in the preface of *LT* it would seem he was advocating precisely what Williams prescribed.

Allen and Swain helpfully remind us, "Not every form of retrieval or every case of remembrance will be helpful."[8] There is the potential to make every act of retrieval simply an act of co-opting something that has been said before to further a bad conclusion. That is why, as Buschart and Eilers have recommended, "looking to Scripture is rightly regarded as the fundamental, archetypal Christian retrieval."[9] Furthermore, when the Bible is rightly interpreted, it is done within the context of the church, not apart from it. The practice of ecclesial interpretation of Scripture, both in a local context and across time, helps prevent corrupt retrieval.[10] The example of the Bereans remains a healthy practice to follow: "Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11 ESV). Therefore, things begin and end with the Scriptures and their rightful interpretation.

Yet, "to turn to Scripture is to look back."[11] As the contemporary church turns its head back to the Scriptures, it finds that there are many others whom have gone before them who have done the very same. When the church looks to Scripture with others that have gone before them, they are in search of developing "tradition, the Spirit-enabled reception of Scripture," which Allen and Swain have declared "is the divinely appointed

---

[7]Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 91, quoted in Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 20.

[8]Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 13.

[9]Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 21.

[10]Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 73.

[11]Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 21.

goal of theology."[12] Buschart and Eilers have stated, "the future of the church hangs in some sense not on our ability to *innovate* (or, at the very least, not *only* to innovate) but in our capacity to creatively and critically retrieve from the church's past."[13] Bonhoeffer sought to establish practices based on traditions of the past as developed from the Scriptures and yet did not always receive wide agreement with his methods or approach. A similar reception would likely be given in trying to do the same in the contemporary church. "Generally speaking, the attitude of the modern age found the past a hindrance to overcome rather than a resource from which to draw."[14] That same spirit is alive today. Therefore, retrieval can be somewhat of an uphill battle.

Whether one faces the temptations to practice retrieval from a revisionist point-of-view or if one faces backlash over the notion of retrieving the past in general, there are clear concerns to note on both sides. Taking Bonhoeffer as an example, there is no shortage of attempts to use Bonhoeffer, particularly *LT* as has been stated, for a project of revisionist retrieval. An example of this is with the New Monasticism movement. Taking its cue from a letter Bonhoeffer sent to his brother in January 1935, this movement has sought to retrieve Bonhoeffer in a way that pays little attention to Bonhoeffer's context or the very intent of the letter to his brother. Bonhoeffer wrote to his brother, "The restoration of the church must surely depend on a new kind of monasticism, which has nothing in common with the old but a life of uncompromising discipleship, following Christ according to the Sermon on the Mount. I believe the time has come to gather people together and do this."[15] Keith Clements, the editor of the particular volume from Bonhoeffer's works in which this letter is found, explained that Bonhoeffer's brother was

---

[12]Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 36.

[13]Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 22.

[14]Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 23.

[15]*DBWE*, 13:285.

skeptical of Bonhoeffer's faith and was a socialist. Thus, Bonhoeffer was trying to both make an apology to his brother for his Christian faith as well as appeal to some of his brother's socialist sensibilities.[16] Missing this context could lead contemporary readers to take Bonhoeffer's words as an impetus for something other than what he meant. Furthermore, simply reading what Bonhoeffer said to his brother reveals that his desire for the renewal of the church was about the church in Germany, which was in the midst of struggle, and not necessarily the church overall. Additionally, Bonhoeffer made plain that this new kind of monasticism would not be like the old kind, yet most proponents of New Monasticism look and sound quite similar to old monasticism. Obeying the Sermon on the Mount and living like a monk are two different things.

Of course, another concern about the project of retrieving the past is that it is considered out-of-touch or not innovative enough. In the majority of Western culture there is a premium on the newest way of doing just about anything, let alone church. For many it is outrageous to think that something as old as the Bible is relevant to their modern way of life. Yet, to propose that someone from another country who lived nearly a hundred years ago had something valuable to say about how to live according to the Bible can seem doubly irrelevant. Buschart and Eilers have usefully stated, "Retrieval entails the church of yesterday helping the church of today to think, speak and act rightly."[17] They also acknowledged, "That being said, retrieval does not deny the fact of change. It does, however, challenge the modern tendency to presume that change is (always) good, as well as the accompanying tendency to emphasize change to the virtual neglect of continuity."[18] After all, "this continuity is ontological. The "church of the past"

---

[16]Keith Clements, *DBWE*, 13:285n4.

[17]Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 32.

[18]Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 35.

and the "church of the present" are, in fact, one church."[19] Bonhoeffer would have been in hearty agreement with this statement in light of his emphasis on union with Christ. Therefore, with a healthy understanding of retrieval set forth, it is now fitting to show some specific areas where *LT* can be recovered and used in the context of a local church today.

Life Together in The Local Church

There are six key areas within common local church life that *LT* can have specific, valuable impact. There may be other things that Bonhoeffer could certainly speak to in contemporary church culture and practice, but these six areas are broad enough that they cover many of the most important things. The six areas are Church Membership, Life Together Without Living Together, Worship Services, Corporate Prayer/Prayer Services, Preaching, Small Group Ministry, and Mission.

Church Membership

Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran and as such the mechanics of what it took for someone to be a member of a church for him may differ from many current evangelical beliefs. Those from a credobaptist tradition would have various things to disagree with Bonhoeffer on regarding baptism itself and in turn church membership. When one thinks about what constitutes the entrance into church membership, Bonhoeffer would have likely said it was baptism. In *CD*, Bonhoeffer stated, "Baptism is essentially a paradoxically passive action; it means being baptized, suffering Christ's call. In baptism we become Christ's possession."[20] If for Bonhoeffer Christian community is in Jesus Christ, then the question to follow would be, how does one get *in* Jesus Christ?[21]

---

[19]Buschart and Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval*, 33.

[20]*DBWE*, 4:207.

[21]*DBWE*, 5:31.

Bonhoeffer's answer was through baptism. However, rather than stating with Bonhoeffer that the Christian's faith interacts with one's baptism as an act of remembering after the fact, a credobaptist would put faith first.[22] Yet, a credobaptist could emphatically agree with Bonhoeffer's statement that "because we are justified by faith, faith and obedience have to be distinguished. But their division must never destroy their unity, which lies in the reality that faith exists only in obedience, is never without obedience. Faith is only faith in deeds of obedience."[23] The primacy of faith is here stated, yet with a strong link to obedience, which is on par with the New Testament book of James. However, the place of strongest agreement with Bonhoeffer regarding church membership has to do with the emphasis on union with Christ.

For many who conduct interviews with possible candidates for church membership, a common question likely revolves around when the candidate was saved and more importantly, whether the candidate is saved. That question is meant to determine if Christ is in the life of the candidate. This is certainly a worthwhile question, yet it lacks an important vitality which could come from Bonhoeffer's emphasis on Christian community. What about asking whether the candidate is *in* Jesus Christ or not? Such a question is a little less about the candidate and more about Christ and the importance of being found in him. Donald Whitney pointed out, "The local church is compared to a family. Is anyone a casual member of a family? No, membership in a family is a very definite thing."[24] Even just shifting the thinking about church membership as those who are *in* Jesus Christ rather than those who have Christ in their lives could prove fruitful in a church's approach to many other things such as discipline, both corrective and formative. Bonhoeffer made plain that participation in a Christian

---

[22]*DBWE*, 4:212.

[23]*DBWE*, 4:64.

[24]Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1996), 47.

community—a church—is something that Christians *may* have; it is not something anyone can demand, but rather something received.[25] Therefore, determining if a candidate for church membership is in Christ is perhaps a more biblical way of discerning a person's relationship with Jesus.

Life Together Without Living Together

One of the greatest challenges in retrieving *LT* is that a majority of Christians today are not currently and are not going to live in a communal setting. Despite the fact that many say they want to "do life together" with their brothers and sisters in Christ, they are not planning to do what was done in Finkenwalde. This is perhaps why many in the New Monasticism movement feel that they are recovering *LT* and other texts like it as they embrace communal Christian living. However, the tragedy of such a use of Bonhoeffer is a blatant disregard of his affirmation of a local church. The man that fought to redeem the church in Germany and named himself among those in the Confessing Church who sought reform, did not disregard the basic idea of church. The changes in his participation in a local church were forced by the Nazi takeover of the state church in Germany; he was forced to go underground. Much of Western culture does not face this same kind of context. Therefore, to claim Christians in the West have to go underground now to be faithful is not because they are forced to do so, but is likely due to political, economic, or revisionist moral impulses. "Every human idealized image that is brought into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be broken up so that genuine community can survive."[26] Thus, the way *LT* can be retrieved cannot include pretending the contemporary Church faces the same context as Bonhoeffer.

A practical way many in the Western Church, particularly in the United States,

---

[25]*DBWE*, 5:36.

[26]*DBWE*, 5:36.

can pursue life together in local churches is to actually prioritize Christian community. Brett McCracken argued, "In the face of growing secularization and the decline of cultural/nominal Christianity in the West, the Christianity that will survive will be the kind that doesn't shrink from discomfort or apologize for the increasingly countercultural things it calls people to believe and do."[27] This requires the kind of specific decisions like not allowing travel sports teams to steal important time with brothers and sisters in the faith for families. This requires fighting the age-old temptation to not pursue business or even extra ministry opportunities to the exclusion of regular, faithful church attendance and participation. This requires bringing families in the local church rather than trying to make one's family the church by excluding the rest of the body. This requires seniors in the church to not be seeking spiritual retirement, but ongoing fruitfulness and growth. This requires singles in the church to be cultivating holiness rather than comfort and worldliness. Pursuing life together in the church today requires effort that goes against the grain of what a "normal life" is today.

Worship Services

One of the wonderful things that resonates from *LT* is the richness of Christian practice that Bonhoeffer upheld. As he laid out practices common for every Christian, though he did not detail what a church service should look like, there are insights to glean. "Only in Jesus Christ are we one; only through him are we bound together."[28] If worship services were planned and practiced with this depth of truth, what kind of fruit could come from that? Jim Belcher argued,

> Deep worship is interactive because God calls everyone, not just the people up front, to participate in worship. This is not a lecture or a concert. As priests, we are all required to be involved. There are no spectators. Thus the liturgy (order of the

---

[27]Brett McCracken, *Uncomfortable: The Awkward and Essential Challenge of Christian Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 37.

[28]*DBWE*, 5:33.

> worship) should be as interactive as possible. It is a dialogue between the people and God. God speaks to us through his Word and we respond.[29]

There is an intentionality that those leading a worship service can present in their words, their prayers, and their practices that seek to remind the church of the centrality of Christ and the church's union with him. It goes beyond simply stating it from time-to-time to actually believing it and putting it into practice. "The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more everything else between us will recede, and the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is alive between us."[30] How Bonhoeffer can inform worship services is not just through practices, but also through the theological foundations that inform practices in worship services. These foundations can, Lord willing, allow Christ and his glory to be the most important things about a church service.

Corporate Prayer/Prayer Services

It is increasingly rare to find a local church that either has a prayer service or prioritizes regular corporate prayer. Even if the church does have some avenue for corporate prayer, it is also rare to find many in regular attendance. The tragedy of this is that many seem to have forgotten or maybe never have known the importance of prayer in the Christian life. However, Bonhoeffer stated, "It is in fact the most normal thing in our common Christian life to pray together."[31] So many do not in fact find it to be all that normal. Yet, as Donald Whitney emphatically argued,

> If you have ever read the book of Acts, you know it is impossible to imagine the members of the church in Jerusalem *not* gathering to pray with each other. This was Christianity in the New Testament. Congregational prayerlessness ought to be just as unimaginable for us in our own churches. If we want to see in our churches what

---

[29]Jim Belcher, *Deep Worship: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 139.

[30]*DBWE*, 5:34.

[31]*DBWE*, 5:69.

they saw in theirs, we should pray with our churches as they prayed with theirs.[32] It is possible that many do not engage in corporate prayer because they do not engage in private prayer. However, corporate prayer can be a great school of prayer to both encourage ongoing corporate prayer, but also private prayer.

Bonhoeffer showed that private prayer is just as vital for the congregation as corporate prayer is. "A Christian community either lives by the intercessory prayers of its members for one another, or the community will be destroyed."[33] Yet, members only know how to intercede for others if they are with other members. A place where members can learn how they need to be interceding for their brothers and sisters is often in the prayer service. The prayer service or any kind of corporate prayer thus serves as an avenue where the church can practice the spiritual discipline of prayer, but also strengthen the community.

Preaching

"Bonhoeffer understood preaching as a form of confessing faith that is generated by the Spirit where the gospel is heard, believed, and reflected upon within the life of the church."[34] After some of his first opportunities to preach in Barcelona, Bonhoeffer excelled in preaching and began to deeply enjoy it. While *LT* does not directly deal with preaching, the application of his work can be retrieved in a similar way as it was to worship services. One of the more direct ways *LT* speaks to preaching in a local church is found in Bonhoeffer's opening words in the book: "In what follows we will take a look at several directions and principles that the Holy Scriptures give us for life together under the Word."[35] Life together under the Word in a local church is

---

[32]Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within The Church*, 165.

[33]*DBWE*, 5:90.

[34]Michael Pasquarello III, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Theology of a Preaching Life* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 4.

[35]*DBWE*, 5:27.

primarily produced and guided by preaching. Preaching is the place where the church comes together underneath the authority of God's Word, waiting and asking for God to speak. Bonhoeffer said,

> Christians no longer live by their own resources, by accusing themselves and justifying themselves, but by God's accusation and God's justification. They live entirely by God's Word pronounced on them, in faithful submission to God's judgment, whether it declares them guilty or righteous. The death and life of Christians are not situated in a self-contained isolation. Rather, Christians encounter both death and life only in the Word that comes to them from the outside, God's Word to them.[36]

Bonhoeffer had no doubts about the power and authority of God's Word in the context of a Christian community or congregation. He saw the Word preached as the Apostle Paul did and as seen in his reason for writing to Titus:

> Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior .(Titus 1:1–3 ESV)

The Word preached is an integral part of the Christian community, namely because it is the means by which God brings people into his church.

Preaching is a place where Bonhoeffer's declaration about Christian community can be proclaimed every week: "Christian community is not an ideal, but a divine reality."[37] Christian community is something that God created, and that truth needs to be announced to the church. That truth can be upheld in preaching all through the Bible as it is part of the Bible's testimony about Christian community. In a sermon Bonhoeffer preached at Finkenwalde in the summer of 1935 on Zechariah 3, he summarized and closed his thoughts,

> This image and this story of Joshua is the image and story of our own church—let us remember these three images—I saw the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand—the church—at every

---

[36]*DBWE*, 5:31.

[37]*DBWE*, 5:35.

> moment and in the last time—standing before God and Satan accusing it—Joshua was wearing filthy clothes; the church, our Confessing Church, stands before God in filthy clothes—take these filthy clothes off it; I have clothed it with festal apparel—God, speak similarly to us and to this church-community; this word is our life; prepare us to stand before you in pure garments. Amen.[38]

Bonhoeffer's own approach to preaching exemplified his belief that the Lord, through his Word, created, maintained, and sanctified the Christian community. The contemporary church would benefit from keeping the same convictions about preaching.

Small Group Ministry

Applying *LT* to small groups is one of the easiest categories of ministry to do many of the things Bonhoeffer prescribed. Small groups can look to *LT* as a helpful guide in determining many, if not all, of the practices they should pursue. Bonhoeffer's depiction of the value of biblical spiritual disciplines both in the lives of the individual members of a small group, but also in the group itself is commendable. Small groups are one of the ways that churches can pursue life together without living together. They can be intentional opportunities to gather Christians for mutual edification and prayer. However, small groups cannot be to the exclusion of regular church practices and participation. The blessings that come through small groups are many, because they are often harder to find in the broader context of a church. Bonhoeffer warned, "It is not the experience of Christian community, but firm and certain faith within Christian community that holds us together."[39] Such a warning is needed, because the lure of experience in small groups is the very reason why many could hold small group involvement as more important than general church involvement.

Mission

LT was not written as a manual for missions, but Bonhoeffer makes a strong

---

[38]*DBWE*, 14:860.

[39]*DBWE*, 5:47.

case for the importance of the Christian community as a means for mission. "Thus in the period between the death of Christ and the day of judgment, when Christians are allowed to live here in visible community with other Christians, we have merely a gracious anticipation of the end time."[40] Just as Christ-honoring marriages are glorious representations of the gospel, so Christ-centered churches are the same. In all the fervor of so many to be missional, Bonhoeffer made the case that one of the most missional things Christians can do is to be part of a local church. Participation in Christian community is a means by which God not only sends his people on mission but is in and of itself a means for mission. Bonhoeffer said that "visible community is grace."[41] That is true from an individual perspective in that many are not always able to enjoy such grace, but any Christian should know that the grace God gives is not meant to be hoarded. God's grace to his people is for them to be sure, but he gives grace that it might be given and shown to others. This is why a local church itself is one of the strongest tools for mission that God has created. As believers meet together all over the world and await the culmination of all things in Christ, the church adorns the gospel in its very existence.

Conclusion

There are many riches to unearth from a book like *LT*. What maximizes and polishes those riches is the understanding of both Bonhoeffer himself and his context. *LT* was the culmination of the trajectory of Bonhoeffer's life, ministry, and study. He offered a biblical vision of Christian community that was set up over and against the pressures he and others faced from the world and Church around him. His theology of Christian community was centered in Jesus Christ, because the Christian community is created by Jesus Christ. The way by which Christian community was to be preserved according to

---

[40]*DBWE*, 5:28.

[41]*DBWE*, 5:28.

Bonhoeffer was through regular participation in the ordinary means of grace and the practice of biblical spiritual disciplines. *LT* should be retrieved and applied to local churches that they may better understand what Christian community is as well as how it is to be maintained.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

À Kempis, Thomas. *The Imitation of Christ*. Translated by William C. Creasy. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007.

_____. *Werke*. Vol. 2, *Imitatio Christi*. Edited by M.J. Pohl. Freiburg, DEU: 1904.

Allen, Michael and Scott R. Swain. *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.

Arnold, Clinton E. *Ephesians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 10. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

Augustine. *The Augustine Series*. Vol. 4, *The Monastic Rules*. Edited by Boniface Ramsey. Translated by Agatha Mary and Gerald Bonner. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004.

Barker, H. Gaylon. *The Cross of Reality: Luther's Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer's Christology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

Barnett, Victoria. *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Belcher, Jim. *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009.

Bethge, Eberhard. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*. Rev. ed. Edited by Victoria J. Barnett. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 1, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 2, *Act and Being.* Edited by Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. Translated by H. Martin Rumscheidt. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 4, *Discipleship*. Edited by Geffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. Translated by Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 5, *Life Together* and *Prayerbook of the Bible*. Edited by Geffrey B. Kelly. Translated by Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 9, *The Young Bonhoeffer, 1918–1927.* Edited by Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green, and Marshall D. Johnson. Translated by Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Scott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 10, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York, 1928–1931.* Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Douglas W. Scott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 11, *Ecumenical, Academic, and Pastoral Work: 1931–1932.* Edited by Victoria J. Barnett, Mark S. Brocker, and Michael B. Lukens. Translated by Anne Schmidt-Lange, Isabel Best, Nicolas Humphrey, and Marion Pauck. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 12, *Berlin: 1932–1933.* Edited by Larry L. Rasmussen. Translated by Isabel Best and David Higgins. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 13, *London, 1933–1935.* Edited by Keith Clements. Translated by Isabel Best. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 14, *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937.* Edited by H. Gaylon Barker and Mark S. Brocker. Translated by Douglas W. Scott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 15, *Theological Education Underground: 1937–1940.* Edited by Victoria J. Barnett. Translated by Victoria J. Barnett, Claudia D. Bergmann, Peter Frick, and Scott A. Moore. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English ed. Vol. 16, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment 1940–1945*. Edited by Mark S. Brocker. Translated by Lisa E, Dahl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. 2nd ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.

Buschart, W. David and Kent D. Eilers. *Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015.

DeJonge, Michael P. *Bonhoeffer's Reception of Luther*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Devine, Mark. *Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at All Costs*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005.

Evangelisches Gesangbuch für Brandenburg und Pommern. Berlin/Frankfurt, 1931.

Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.

Frame, John M. *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015.

Green, Clifford J. *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.

Haynes, Stephen R. *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: Post-Holocaust Perspectives*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

_____. *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

Heermann, Johann. "Christ Our Champion." Translated by Catherine Winkworth. In *Lyra Germanica*. 2nd series. *The Christian Life*. New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1859.

House, Paul R. *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.

Kershaw, Ian. *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914–1949*. New York: Viking, 2015.

Kirkpatrick, Michael D., ed. *Engaging Bonhoeffer: The Impact and Influence of Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016.

Kruse, Colin G. *The Letters of John*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.

Lincoln, Andrew T. *Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary 42. Dallas: Word Books, 1990.

Lutheran Book of Worship. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978.

Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. Vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*. Edited by E. Theodore Bachmann. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960.

_____. *Luther's Works*. Vol. 51, *Sermons I*. Edited and Translated by John W. Doberstein. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959.

_____. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. 3rd ed. Edited by Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

_____. *The Annotated Luther*. Vol. 1, *The Roots of Reform*. Edited by Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

_____. *The Annotated Luther*. Vol. 2, *Word and Faith*. Edited by Kirsi I. Stjerna. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

Marsh, Charles. *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

_____. *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.

Marshall, I. Howard. *The First Epistles of John*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978.

McCracken, Brett. *Uncomfortable: The Awkward and Essential Challenge of Christian Community*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.

Metaxas, Eric. *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010.

Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.

Nichols, Stephen J. *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life: From the Cross, For the World*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

Pao, David W. *Colossians & Philemon*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 12. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Pasquarello, Michael, III. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Theology of a Preaching Life*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017.

Piper, John. *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. Rev. ed. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2011.

Riethmüller, Otto, ed. *Ein neues Lied*. Berlin-Dahlem, 1932.

Root, Andrew. *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014.

Schlingensiepen, Ferdinand. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance.* Translated by Isabel Best. London: T&T Clark, 2010.

Scholder, Klaus. *The Churches and the Third Reich*. Vol. 2, *The Year of Disillusionment: 1934 Barmen and Rome*. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998.

Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines within the Local Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1996.

Williams, Rowan. *Why Study the Past?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

Wilson, Jonathan R. *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: From After Virtue to a New Monasticism*. 2nd ed. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010.

Winkworth, Catherine, trans. *Lyra Germanica*. 2nd series. *The Christian Life*. New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1859.

Articles

Barth, Karl. "From Karl Barth, October 14, 1936." In *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English edition*,* Vol. 14, *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Edited by H. Gaylon Barker and Mark S. Brocker. Translated by Douglas W. Scott, 265–69. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.

Fesko, J. V. "Union with Christ." In *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, edited by Matthew Barrett, 423–50. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.

Hodgson, Peter C. "Hegel's Philosophy of Religion." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*. Edited by Frederick C. Beiser, 230–52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Macleod, William. "Bonhoeffer—A Reliable Guide?" *Free Church Witness* (September 2016): 3–6.

McBride, Jennifer. "Christ Existing as Concrete Community Today." *Theology Today* 71, no. 1 (2014): 92–105.

Nessan, Craig L. "What If the Church Really Is the Body of Christ?" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 43–52.

Nicolaisen, Carsten. "Concerning the History of the Bethel Confession." Translated by Douglas W. Scott. In *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works,* English edition*,* Vol. 12, *Berlin: 1932–1933*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Edited by Larry L. Rasmussen. Translated by Isabel Best and David Higgins, 509–13. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

Ortlund, Dane C. "Christocentrism: An Asymmetrical Trinitarianism?" *Themelios* 34, no. 3 (November 2009): 309–21.

Paulson, Steven D. "Christology." In *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*, edited by Timothy J. Wengert, 142–45. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.

Pierard, Richard V. "The Lutheran Two-Kingdoms Doctrine and Subservience to the State in Modern Germany." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 2 (June 1986): 193–203.

Yarbrough, Robert W. "Bonhoeffer as Bible Scholar." *Themelios* 37, no. 2 (July 2012): 185–90.

Dissertation

Bezner, Steven M. "Understanding the World Better Than It Understands Itself: The Theological Hermeneutics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer." PhD diss., Baylor University, 2008.

ABSTRACT

RETRIEVING A THEOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY FOR COMMUNITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH FROM DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S *LIFE TOGETHER*

Nicholas James Abraham, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin

In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer showed that Christian community is created and maintained in Christ through the ordinary means of grace and spiritual disciplines. Chapter 1 surveys the prominent literature on Bonhoeffer and displays the need for applying *Life Together* to the local church. Chapter 2 explores Bonhoeffer's life and major theological writings, showing the progression of his major theological emphases. Chapter 3 details the historical context of *Life Together* looking back from Martin Luther to the time of Bonhoeffer. Chapter 4 is a detailed summary of *Life Together*, which also explores the various sources and biblical texts Bonhoeffer used. Chapter 5 traces major theological themes in *Life Together*, from their beginning in Bonhoeffer's early work to his time in Finkenwalde and weighs the biblical fidelity of Bonhoeffer's theology of community. Chapter 6 looks at how *Life Together* can be retrieved and applied in the context of a contemporary local church.

VITA

Nicholas James Abraham

EDUCATION

B.A., Kent State University, 2007
M.Div., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012

PUBLICATIONS

Contributor. *Make Mature Multiply: Becoming Fully-Formed Disciples of Jesus*. Edited by Brandon D. Smith. GCD Books, 2014.

ORGANIZATIONS

The Evangelical Theological Society

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastoral Intern, Stanwood Community Church, Navarre, Ohio, 2010
Interim Pastor, Light of Christ Church, Waynesburg, Ohio, 2010–2011
Pastoral Intern, Alpine Bible Church, Sugarcreek, Ohio, 2013–2014
Associate Pastor, Alpine Bible Church, Sugarcreek, Ohio, 2014–