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CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE END OF THE NATURAL LAW:
DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S CHRISTOLOGICAL ETHICS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

JORDAN J. BALLOR

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

MAY 2015

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Ad extremum vero per Filium suum unigenitum complevit

"In any case, one thing has emerged that seems certain: in the common life of human beings, there are laws that are stronger than everything that believes it can supersede them, and that it is therefore not only wrong but unwise to disregard these laws."

–Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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Any work of this nature is the result of far more than one person's labor. In fact, as I have learned largely by working on the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, nothing we humans accomplish is simply the work of an individual. We are dependent upon God for each gift of grace that each moment of our lives represent. We are dependent upon the grace that God deigns to share with us through the love and service of others, both past and present.

It is still appropriate, however, to acknowledge the special contributions of the many people who have in some way or another aided and supported this project. I was first encouraged to pursue programmatic study in the thought of Bonhoeffer by my friend, colleague, and mentor Stephen Grabill. I was supported in this work intellectually and materially by the faculty, staff, and students of Calvin Theological Seminary, first in the pursuit of a master's degree with a thesis on Bonhoeffer, and later in the undertaking of the doctoral program. I owe great thanks to all of my teachers at Calvin Seminary, but especially to those who have taken particular interest in my work or provided research supervision, including John Bolt, Calvin Van Reken, and Richard Muller. The caliber of students that Calvin attracts means that often one ends up learning as much from one's students as from the professors, and having taken so many years to complete this program, I have had the privilege to learn from many such friends and colleagues.

I have also had the privilege of pursuing graduate study while working at an independent research and educational organization, the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion & Liberty. The Acton Institute has provided me with a vital and stable haven for

much study and opportunities for writing, speaking, and learning that are absolutely unsurpassed. I am finishing this degree after nearly five years of full-time work at the Acton Institute, which is also celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary this year. The co-founders, Kris Mauren and the Rev. A. Robert Sirico, have achieved something remarkable in building and developing this institution over the past quarter century and I am eager to see what God has in store in the future.

The academic life is demanding in its own particular ways, and the demands are largely borne by those closest to us. My wonderful wife Amy has supported and encouraged my work through these many years, putting up with far more than could justly be asked of anyone. Her generosity and love is proof that God exists and that he cares for me. My children, Owen, Sela, and Evan have also been great inspirations, distractions, and encouragers of my work, and I hope that I have acquitted my responsibility to vicariously represent them in something approaching a respectable fashion.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has been a mentor to me through the writings that have survived and the life that he lived. No doubt he would point beyond himself to Christ, but Bonhoeffer's wisdom and witness serve as a worthy testimony to the love of Christ, which surpasses all understanding.

ABBREVIATIONS

CD	Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. 4 vols. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Translated by G. T. Thomson. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-77.
DBW	Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*. 17 vols. Edited by Eberhard Bethge et al. Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1986-1999.
DBWE	Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*. 17 vols. Edited by Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996-2014.
LW	Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*. 55 vols. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. Philadelphia: Fortress / St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1976.
NCE1	*New Catholic Encyclopedia*. 15 vols. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.
PRRD	Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
ST	Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*.

ABSTRACT

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) has often been understood as articulating an occasionalistic, divine-command theory of ethics. In this regard, he is often seen as aligned with Karl Barth (1886-1968). This study challenges this view by demonstrating that Bonhoeffer's own ethical project was aimed at resuscitating and reviving a distinctively Protestant form of natural-law thinking. Bonhoeffer's approach was characterized by an emphasis on the origin, formation, and goal of natural mandates in, by, and toward Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer's early teaching concerning orders of preservation and laws of life was developed into a mature doctrine of divine mandates in his *Ethics*, which are best understood as Christologically defined manifestations of natural law. Christ is the "end" or *telos* of the natural law for Bonhoeffer, and in this way Bonhoeffer attempts to rehabilitate the concept of the "natural" for Protestant ethics. Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the divine mandates, when combined with complementary teachings concerning vocation and vicarious representative action, represent an important resource for contemporary Protestant social thought. His efforts are instructive for contemporary debates and problems, and under each of Bonhoeffer's four mandates (family and marriage, culture and work, church, and government), this study takes up specific contemporary issues in an attempt to constructively engage and apply Bonhoeffer's insights today.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The rejection of natural law as inimical to the gospel became a hallmark of much of Protestant social thought in the twentieth century. Only relatively recently has this rejection of natural law come under serious scrutiny from Protestant scholars. James M. Gustafson summarized the twentieth-century denial of natural law as one notable aspect of unity in the midst of otherwise great diversity of Protestant ethical thought: “On the whole, however, there has been consensus on the rejection of the natural law tradition and particularly on the metaphysics of that tradition.”[1] This connection between Protestantism and the rejection of natural law became so dominant that contemporary studies continue to repeat such claims. Thus Brad S. Gregory, a Roman Catholic scholar, associates Protestantism with a biblicist ethic of divine command and the rejection of natural law.[2] Since Gustafson’s assessment nearly forty years ago, a small but growing movement of Protestant advocates of natural law has begun to question this consensus on a variety of points.

Some of the initial and foundational efforts toward recovering the place of natural law in Protestant ethics have focused on making historical cases about natural-law teaching

[1] James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 62.

[2] See Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2012), 185: “Those who repudiated the Roman church uncoupled the medieval discourse on natural rights from the teleological Christian ethics within which it had been embedded.” Compare Kevin Hart, “Bonhoeffer’s ‘Religious Clothes’: The Naked Man, the Secret, and What We Hear,” in *Bonhoeffer and Continental Thought: Cruciform Philosophy*, ed. Brian Gregor and Jens Zimmerman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 192: “Like Luther and Calvin, Bonhoeffer subscribes to a divine command ethics.”

in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras.[3] Such studies have typically, although not exclusively, attempted to show that doctrines of natural law functioned positively in the construction of Protestant doctrinal, and in some cases confessional, statements. These studies have shown rather convincingly that the common juxtaposition of natural law and divine command theories of the grounding of ethics are not reflective of the history of Protestant theology in the era of the Reformation, particularly among the Reformed. In some cases this historical survey has progressed to include more recent figures.[4] Likewise there have been important studies focused on the relationship of the Lutheran tradition to natural law.[5] In addition to these largely historical approaches, there are at least two other ways that scholars have argued for the recovery of Protestant approaches to natural law. First, as might be expected given Protestantism's historical emphasis on scriptural authority, the question of the biblical basis for natural law occupies an important place in determining the value of the doctrine for Protestant ethics.[6] Second, the utility of natural

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[3] See, for instance, Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). For an excellent survey of the situation in the era of Protestant scholasticism, see David S. Sytsma, "Sir Matthew Hale (1609-1676) and Natural Law in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 205-256.

[4] David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

[5] On the Lutheran side, see the variety of essays, both historical and contemporary in focus, contained in Robert C. Baker and Roland Cap Ehlke, eds., *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011); and Gifford A. Grobien, "A Lutheran Understanding of Natural Law in the Three Estates," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (July 2009): 211-229. See also Eric J. Hutchinson and Korey D. Maas, "Niels Hemmingsen (1513–1600) and the Development of Lutheran Natural-Law Thinking," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 595-616.

[6] See C. John Collins, "Echoes of Aristotle in Romans 2:14-15: Or, Maybe Abimelech Was Not So Bad After All," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 123-73; Gary M. Simpson, "'Written on Their Hearts': Thinking with Luther about Scripture, Natural Law, and the Moral Life," *Word & World* 30, no. 4 (September 2010): 419-428; David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

law for addressing a variety of contemporary ethical concerns has contributed to the resurgence of the doctrine among Protestants.[7] Within the context of these three concerns the basic questions of natural law's historic catholicity, its biblical basis, and its modern-day relevance are addressed.

This present study contributes to this larger renaissance of natural law among Protestants by finding support for arguments for the catholicity and contemporary relevance of natural law from what might be considered a rather unlikely source, the twentieth-century Lutheran theologian and pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In most cases Bonhoeffer has been understood as standing within a tradition, largely influenced by Karl Barth, that rejected the positive place of natural law in Protestant thought in favor of an ethic of divine command.[8] But a more careful and contextually sensitive approach to the

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2014); idem, "Natural Law in Noahic Accent: A Covenantal Conception of Natural Law Drawn from Genesis 9,"*Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 30, no. 2 (September 2010): 131-140; idem, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2006); and Alan F. Johnson, "Is There a Biblical Warrant for Natural-Law Theories?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25, no. 2 (June 1982): 185-199. On the broader question of natural theology and the Bible, see James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology: The Gifford Lectures for 1991 Delivered in the University of Edinburgh* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

[7] See David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); idem, *Bioethics and Christian Life: A Guide to Making Difficult Decisions* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009); J. Daryl Charles, *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Craig A. Boyd, *A Shared Morality: A Narrative Defense of Natural Law Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007); and Michael Cromartie, ed., *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics, and Natural Law* (Washington, DC and Grand Rapids, MI: Ethics and Public Policy Center and Eerdmans, 1997). Charles' book also includes a brief but helpful historical survey of the views of various reformers. For a summary of the contemporary interaction between various Protestant traditions and natural law, see Jordan J. Ballor, "Natural Law and Protestantism—A Review Essay," *Christian Scholar's Review* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 193-209. See also Jesse Covington, Bryan McGraw, and Micah Watson, eds., *Natural Law and Evangelical Political Thought* (Lanham: Lexington, 2013).

[8] On divine command see, for instance, John Hare, *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Robert Merrihew Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 97-122; and Philip

thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer shows that such a view must, in the final analysis, be deemed wholly inadequate. In part this is because the simple juxtaposition of divine command and natural-law approaches does not do justice either to the historic Protestant tradition or to Bonhoeffer's own thought. As Brian Gregor and Jens Zimmerman observe, "Bonhoeffer's incarnational Christology allows him to combine a number of elements that remain all too often opposed in current discussions." To their list of paired concepts (e.g. "immanence and transcendence, ontology and ethics," et al.) we might add natural law and divine command.[9] Indeed, two fundamental purposes of this study of the intersection of natural-law thinking and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theological ethics, then, are to show both that Bonhoeffer was a kind of natural-law thinker, whose account of the moral order is oriented toward obedience to God's will (ultimately as revealed in Jesus Christ), and that Bonhoeffer's insights have something to contribute to the contemporary project of renewing robust Protestant articulations of ethics, particularly rooted in accounts of natural law.

The particular utility of Bonhoeffer for the revitalization of natural law today has to do both with the dynamism of his own thought as well as his placement as a younger contemporary of such theological luminaries as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. Bonhoeffer's ethical thought anticipated themes and developments recognized by others decades later. For instance, the contemporary Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten has affirmed the significance of natural law in Lutheran thought, observing, "A new-style

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Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

[9] Brian Gregor and Jens Zimmerman, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Cruciform Philosophy," in *Bonhoeffer and Continental Thought*, 19.

natural law will have to emerge under the new conditions of historical understanding and in the light of the biblical eschatological horizon of the kingdom of God, if it is to satisfy the demands of modernity and the Christian faith."[10] Similarly the Anglican moral theologian Oliver O'Donovan has criticized neo-orthodox ethics that have "put Christ at the center without putting him at the center of the created world."[11] Bonhoeffer, however, represents a position that in fact does take into account the significance of Christ as the origin and center of the created order as well as his lordship as the goal or *telos* of that order. His ethics thus open up dynamic and fruitful possibilities for reconciling natural law with a Christocentric system of ethics. For Bonhoeffer Christ is the origin, vital principle, and end (*telos*) of the natural law. In this way Bonhoeffer's Christological ethics already begins to provide an answer to a question that arises in the context of neo-orthodoxy and crystallizes in the thought of later theologians.

Significant difficulties attending to an endeavor to recover Bonhoeffer for contemporary natural-law ethics become immediately apparent, however. First, the great weight of scholarly opinion for the better part of the last century comes down solidly against connecting Bonhoeffer and natural law. This general consensus gains further strength from its seemingly indisputable support from Bonhoeffer's own work, which is at best ambivalent and very often outright hostile to explicit expressions of natural law as such. This ambivalence leads Jennifer Moberly, for instance, to attempt to disassociate

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[10] Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 129.

[11] Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World, and Time: Ethics as Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 93. See also O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

virtue ethics from natural law in order to salvage for Bonhoeffer the former from the latter.[12] If my reading of Bonhoeffer's relationship with natural law is correct, however, it would open up greater possibilities for connection not only with virtue ethics but also with the larger Christian natural-law tradition. But by most accounts, the attempt to find much help for natural law today in the life and work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer might seem to be doomed to failure, or at best relegated to a problematic method of selectively citing minor texts with little basis in the larger theological program of Bonhoeffer himself.

It is appropriate here to simply point out two of the factors that will to some extent mitigate the apparent difficulties. The first mitigating factor is that the secondary scholarship's engagement with Bonhoeffer and the question of natural law has not adequately taken into account the gradual historical constriction of the understanding of natural law, particularly through the course of the nineteenth century. By the time of the Barth-Brunner debate in 1934, to advocate for a natural law meant, to put it quite starkly and from a polemically Protestant perspective epitomized by Barth, that one was either a Roman Catholic or a pagan rationalist. More directly, I will not be arguing that Bonhoeffer embraced a form of natural law identifiable with either neo-Thomism or German Idealism (or rationalism more generally), but rather that his approach is more consonant with older, more robust and less truncated, approaches to Protestant ethics (particularly as represented in Martin Luther and Lutheran social ethical frameworks), which in fact did not violently separate natural moral laws from divine commands.

A second mitigating factor making the project at hand possible is that the secondary

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[12] Jennifer Moberly, *The Virtue of Bonhoeffer's Ethics: A Study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ethics in Relation to Virtue Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), particularly 94-95.

scholarship's interaction with Bonhoeffer's source material has been methodologically limited. That is, in many cases the interaction with Bonhoeffer's work has been restricted to a selection of his works, or limited by hermeneutical assumptions about Bonhoeffer's views, and sometimes both. Generally speaking these limitations come to expression in what can be called problems of periodization and interpretation. These two problems come to the fore in more detail in the exploration of the state of the scholarly question with respect to Bonhoeffer and natural law (and by extension to Bonhoeffer's relationship with Karl Barth).

The State of the Question

The bulk of historiographical and theological scholarship on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and work, Anglophone or otherwise, has presumed him to stand in general continuity with the theological program of Karl Barth.[13] And while today Bonhoeffer enjoys a great deal of respect on the European continent for the depth and insight of his theological work, North American scholarship suffers from the compounding problem that Bonhoeffer is often treated from a pastoral or martyrological perspective, with the result that attention to the rigor of his academic and scholarly theological contributions is haphazard.

The relationship between Bonhoeffer and Barth has been a basic interpretive

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[13] See, for instance, Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); and idem, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: 'Within, not Outside the Barthian Movement,'" in *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in His Thought*, ed. Peter Frick (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 245-282. Paul Riceour called Bonhoeffer "the most outstanding of Karl Barth's disciples." See Paul Ricoeur, "L'interprétation non-religieuse du christianisme chez Bonhoeffer," *Les Cahiers du Centre Protestant de l'Ouest*, no. 7 (November 1966): 3; ET: "The Non-religious Interpretation of Christianity in Bonhoeffer," trans. Brian Gregor, in *Bonhoeffer and Continental Thought*, 156.

problem in Bonhoeffer scholarship. There are two aspects to this characterization of their relationship, one more general and the second more particular. The more general aspect refers to the understanding of Bonhoeffer as a "Barthian" in any general or undefined sense.[14] Such characterizations range from an unqualified or generalized depiction of Bonhoeffer as a faithful Barthian to a more nuanced view which takes into account other theological influences.

The generalized conception of Bonhoeffer usually understands him to be working from within Barth's basic framework, so that Barth is the one who sets the parameters and the agenda, while Bonhoeffer restricts himself to working within these boundaries in a constructively critical fashion. Charles Marsh, for example, writes, "Whatever differences of emphasis and background inform the complex interactions of the two theologians, Bonhoeffer's theology is possible only in view of Barth's revolution in theological method."[15] Likewise Martin Rumscheidt asserts, "Bonhoeffer's critique never diminished the significance of and the need for a theology like Barth's."[16] Similarly Philip K. Zeigler contends, "It is fair to say that Barth was for Bonhoeffer the most significant contemporary

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[14] This kind of understanding in reference to Bonhoeffer is especially curious given Barth's comments in the preface to his *Church Dogmatics* that his "book will be the better understood the more it is conceived…as standing on its own, and the less it is conceived as representing a movement, tendency, or school," and, "I know many men and women towards whom I am conscious of being wholeheartedly sympathetic in general outlook. But this does not constitute a school, and I certainly cannot think in this emphatic way of those who are commonly associated with me as leaders or adherents of the so-called 'dialectical theology,'" *CD* I/1, xiv-xv.

[15] Charles Marsh, *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), ix.

[16] Martin Rumscheidt, "The Formation of Bonhoeffer's Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 65.

theological authority and that he wrote his own theology with Barth always in mind."[17]

Clifford J. Green illustrates the somewhat more nuanced approach regarding Bonhoeffer's general relationship to Barth, as in a discussion of the influence of liberal theology on Bonhoeffer he notes that "while Bonhoeffer was a 'Barthian' in Berlin, he was nevertheless a 'Berliner.'"[18] The contrast here is between Barthian neo-orthodoxy and the liberal theology of Berlin, as exemplified, for instance, by Adolf von Harnack.[19] Shin Chiba, focusing on Bonhoeffer's later works, finds that "it is now almost axiomatic to acknowledge Bonhoeffer's substantial indebtedness to Barth's self-conscious and consistent effort to repudiate unqualifiedly traditional metaphysical, and hence religious, conceptions of God."[20] Sabine Dramm, distinguishing between a more traditional Reformation-era approach and that of neo-orthodoxy, writes that "with regard to the question of preparing the way, of the relationship between ethics and eschatology, Bonhoeffer's thought parts company with Luther the Reformer and follows instead that of

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[17] Philip G. Ziegler, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Theologian of the Word of God," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 21.

[18] Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 239. See also Heinz Eduard Tödt, *Authentic Faith: Bonhoeffer's Theological Ethics in Context*, trans. David Stassen and Ilse Tödt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 30-39; and John D. Godsey, "Barth and Bonhoeffer: The Basic Difference," *Quarterly Review* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 9-27.

[19] On Barth's relationship to liberal theology, particularly Albrecht Ritschl, see Richard A. Muller, "Karl Barth and the Path of Theology in the Twentieth Century: Historical Observations," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51, no. 1 (1989): 25-50. For Bonhoeffer's intellectual development in this regard, see Martin Rumscheidt, "The Significance of Adolf von Harnack and Reinhold Seeberg for Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation*, 201-224.

[20] Shin Chiba, "Christianity on the Eve of Postmodernity: Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *Christian Ethics in Ecumenical Context: Theology, Culture, and Politics in Dialogue*, ed. Shin Chiba, George R. Hunsberger, and Lester Edwin J. Ruiz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 192.

another theologian, *the* reformed theologian of his own century, Karl Barth."[21] So too concludes Ralf K. Wüstenberg: "It is evident—in sum—that every critical statement on religion that can be found in Bonhoeffer's writings is based upon Barth's theology."[22] A characterization thus arises of Karl Barth, the preeminent Reformed theologian of the twentieth century, inaugurating a revolution in theological insight, which forms the backdrop for Dietrich Bonhoeffer's contribution as a Barthian with a Lutheran accent.

This general tendency to see broad agreement in the theological perspectives of Bonhoeffer and Barth comes to more particular expression especially in the consensus understanding of Bonhoeffer's attitude toward natural theology. Very often such scholarship has taken as a basic assumption that Bonhoeffer's views of natural law accord with Barth's, and from that assumption have read the works of the two theologians as complementary, if not entirely univocal.[23] One consequence of this connection between Bonhoeffer and Barth is that during the period in Protestant theology that has sometimes been described in terms of a "Barthian hegemony" following Wold War II, the salient

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[21] Sabine Dramm, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. Thomas Rice (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 24. Tödt rightly notes that "the point at issue between Barth and Bonhoeffer is the understanding of revelation." See Tödt, *Authentic Faith*, 31. On this point, Dramm (along with many others) does note the divergence between Barth and Bonhoeffer, as Bonhoeffer, "much as he himself was rooted in dialectic theology with his own verdict on religion, he nevertheless distances himself from Barth with this verdict on the positivism of revelation." See Dramm, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 201. Unfortunately Dramm is typical of the treatment of this relationship in the literature, as the implications of this divergence are not fully accounted for.

[22] Ralf K. Wüstenberg, "Philosophical Influences on Bonhoeffer's 'Religionless Christianity,'" in *Bonhoeffer and Continental Thought*, 142.

[23] See the presumptive linkage of Barth and Bonhoeffer throughout Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004). Illustrative of Hauerwas' assumption is his comment in an interview that Bonhoeffer was "thoroughly orthodox in his convictions and Barthian all the way down." See Hauerwas, "Bonhoeffer: The Truthful Witness," *Homiletics*, no. 2, March-April 2005, pp. 10-11.

differences between the views of Barth and Bonhoeffer on the fundamental questions of natural law and natural theology have not been subjected to sufficiently critical scrutiny.[24] John W. de Gruchy writes of Bonhoeffer in the introduction to *Creation and Fall*, "As in the *Ethics*, however, he was following Barth in rejecting natural theology."[25] The editors to the German edition of the same text likewise state, "By taking seriously humankind's being-*sicut-deus* Bonhoeffer rejects every natural theology."[26] Green similarly shares this assessment, as he writes that "Bonhoeffer stood with Barth in rejecting natural theology, even though he made serious criticism of Barth's early theology."[27] Unfortunately, these assertions are not typically supported by any comprehensive discussion. Exactly what this "natural theology" is that is rejected by both Barth and Bonhoeffer is not explicitly stated, although it undoubtedly includes central issues resonating throughout Karl Barth's theology, as articulated in the Barth-Brunner debate of 1934 as well as in his commentary on Romans (1919), his book on Anselm, and his *Church Dogmatics*.[28]

A critically important context for understanding this linkage between Barth and Bonhoeffer is, in fact, the German church struggle of the 1930s. As Bonhoeffer's friend

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[24] On Barthian "hegemony" from 1934-1990, see Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 21. See also Charles, *Retrieving the Natural Law*, 114-25; and Richard A. Muller, "The Place and Importance of Karl Barth in the Twentieth Century: A Review Essay," *Westminster Theological Journal* 50 (1988): 127-156.

[25] DBWE 3:11-12.

[26] DBWE 3:170-71.

[27] Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 203.

[28] See Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002; repr. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946); Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933); Karl Barth, *Anselm, fides quaerens intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme* (London: SCM Press, 1960); and CD.

and biographer Eberhard Bethge writes, this period is characterized by "theological differences, accompanied by a very close alliance in church politics" between Barth and Bonhoeffer.[29] In many cases, however, the perception of a close alliance between Barth and Bonhoeffer on the church-political stage in the 1930s, along with Barth's connection of this *Kirchenkampf* to the struggle over natural theology, has led many scholars to uncritically accept the view that Barth and Bonhoeffer were in essential agreement not merely in church-political matters but also in natural theological and ethical concerns.[30] This error has been repeated and disseminated widely in the scholarship.

Methodological approaches that begin with Bonhoeffer's fragmentary and late work, which were the first to become wide available in English translation, contribute to this distorted picture of Bonhoeffer's theology.[31] This early scholarship initiated what might be called the problem of periodization in Bonhoeffer scholarship. Because Bonhoeffer's corpus was not read in its entirety, the continuity between earlier concepts like his "orders of preservation" and the later ethical "mandates" were largely ignored or unexplored. In this way the publication history of Bonhoeffer's works in English provide

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[29] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, trans. Eric Mosbacher et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 178.

[30] For a closer examination of the relationship between Bonhoeffer and Barth during this time, see Jordan J. Ballor, "The Aryan Clause, the Confessing Church, and the Ecumenical Movement: Barth and Bonhoeffer on Natural Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59, no. 3 (August 2006): 263-280. Representative of the persistence of interpretations the theological as well as church-political alliances between Barth and Bonhoeffer is John Michael Owen, "Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the Aryan Clause, 1933-1935: A Response to Jordan Ballor," *Colloquium* 42, no. 1 (May 2010): 3-28.

[31] For a good survey of the reception of Bonhoeffer in both Anglophone scholarship and popular culture, see Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004). See also Timothy Larsen, "The Evangelical Reception of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, 39-54.

an added explanatory aspect regarding the misunderstanding of the relationship between Bonhoeffer and natural law. The scholarship during the first few decades after Dietrich Bonhoeffer's execution in 1945 deals particularly, and often eclectically, with *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Representatives of this early trend of Bonhoeffer interpretation include Hanfried Müller and John A. Phillips.[32] This almost exclusive focus on Bonhoeffer's final writings has some problematic elements for finding coherence in Bonhoeffer's overall theology. Otto Dudzus, a student of Bonhoeffer's, summarizes the position of this scholarship well, as he writes that this group is "fascinated by the impact and audacity of [Bonhoeffer's] vision of a religionless Christianity."[33] Dudzus describes the methodological presuppositions of such works in the following way: "It does not make the slightest difference that his ideas about a world come-of-age and the Christian testimony appropriate to such a world have come down to us only in fragmentary form. It is exactly in this fragmentary form that they stir our souls—more than they would in completed shape."[34]

Clifford J. Green was one of the first to point out some of the difficulties brought about by the earlier scholarship and propose a corrective course of study. His 1972 work, *The Sociality of Christ and Humanity: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Early Theology, 1927-1933*, represents the beginning of a major shift in Bonhoeffer studies. The title itself clearly

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[32] See Hanfried Müller, *Von der Kirche zur Welt: Ein Beitrag zu d. Beziehungen d. Wortes Gottes auf d. Societas in Dietrich Bonhoeffers theolog. Entwicklung* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang VOB, 1961); and John A. Phillips, *Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). See also Green's discussion in *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 7-13.

[33] Otto Dudzus, "Discipleship and Worldliness in the Thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *Religion in Life* 35, no. 2 (1966): 230.

[34] Dudzus, "Discipleship and Worldliness," 230.

shows where Green's emphasis lay, that is, in what Green understands as Bonhoeffer's "early theology." For Green, the study of this period is essential for understanding all of Bonhoeffer's later works. After making a thorough case for examining the period of 1927–1933, Green addresses the problems presented by the preceding scholarship. As he writes in the 1999 revision of his earlier work, "So great has been the impact of the prison letters that the bulk of Bonhoeffer scholarship has concentrated on, or been directed to, the interpretation of those seminal but incomplete writings."[35]

Green's emphasis on correcting the under-examination of the early works was picked up and continued by others, as works by Bonhoeffer such as *Sanctorum Communio* (1927) and *Act and Being* (1930) gained greater recognition and appreciation. Wayne Floyd uses the same periodical emphasis as Green, as he writes, "the true *Sache* or object of Bonhoeffer's later and more familiar writings is largely misleading, if not unintelligible, when unmoored from this early anchorage."[36] Green and Floyd represent an important strain in Bonhoeffer scholarship that seeks to view all of Bonhoeffer's work from the foundation of his work of 1927–1933. But in attempting to correct the error of earlier scholarship, which focuses almost exclusively on Bonhoeffer's writings during World War II, Green and others overemphasize the importance of Bonhoeffer's pre-1931 works. Given Green's schema of viewing 1927–1933 as a unified period and his placement of the essence (although not the dating) of *Discipleship* within that period, there is a temptation to overemphasize the continuities between *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* on the

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[35] Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 6.

[36] Wayne Floyd, "Christ, Concreteness, and Creation in the Early Bonhoeffer," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 39, no. 1-2 (1984): 101.

one hand, and *Creation and Fall*, the Christology lectures, *Discipleship*, and *Life Together* on the other.

Indeed, the years of 1931–1939 are appropriately understood as the middle period of Bonhoeffer's life. Given the importance of his 1931 experience of something like a "conversion," a turning toward the church and away from the academy for the rest of his life and engagement of theological and existential problems, the pre-1931 works should not be viewed as representing the high points of Bonhoeffer's overall theology.[37] In fact, this middle period of Bonhoeffer's most prolific activity has been relatively under-examined in comparison with the work of those who focus on his later or earlier periods. Scholarship tended initially overemphasized Bonhoeffer's World War II works, and following Green has swung to the other extreme, often reading all of Bonhoeffer's later works as being fundamentally or seminally present in his earlier works, especially the pre-1931 works, *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*.

There are several reasons for viewing the middle period of Bonhoeffer's career as having more relative evaluative significance than either his earlier period (1927–1931) or his later period (1939–1945). As alluded to earlier, the early period encompasses Bonhoeffer's first two major works, *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*.[38] Each of these works was completed as part of his academic theological career. Given the success (or lack thereof) of his later academic works (e.g. *Creation and Fall*) these two works could be seen as embodying his greatest academic achievements.

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[37] On this "turn" or "transition," see Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 202-206; and Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 134-135.

[38] On *Act and Being*, see Michael P. DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin, Barth, and Protestant Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

The last stage of Bonhoeffer's career certainly includes the most tragic and dramatically poignant moments of his life. Nevertheless, the texts available from this period are both of an unsystematic or fragmentary nature. *Ethics* was never completed, and despite the diligence of its later codifiers, should not be viewed as a systematic whole or with the same finality as a completed, systematic work. *Letters and Papers from Prison* is by its very nature a collection of unsystematic and intimately personal reactions to Bonhoeffer's tenuous political situation. The collection of letters related to Bonhoeffer and his fiancée, Maria von Wedemeyer, were only published after Maria's death in 1977, and so became available after the initial wave of Bonhoeffer scholarship had already crested.[39]

The conclusion reached by such methodological concerns leaves us with the middle period of Bonhoeffer's life from 1931 to 1939 as the lengthiest, and most significant in terms of his activity within the church and in terms of his theological productivity.[40] This period encompasses the transition from being a university lecturer to a pastor and seminary director, from a man on the government payroll to an ecclesiastical outlaw increasingly engaged in resistance. Dudzus summarizes those placing the greatest emphasis on this middle period as being "chiefly filled with gratitude for Bonhoeffer's part in the German church struggle. These people regard his books such as *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life*

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[39] Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer, *Love Letters from Cell 92: The Correspondence between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer 1943-45*, ed. Ruth-Alice von Bismarck and Ulrich Kabitz, trans. John Brownjohn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

[40] For a survey of literature using these dates of Bonhoeffer's two visits to America as an interpretive device, see Jordan J. Ballor, "Bonhoeffer in America—A Review Essay," *Christian Scholar's Review* 37, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 465-482. The division of Bonhoeffer's life and work into three periods is also derived from the organizational structure of Bethge's biography. An earlier version of this framework for periodization is rehearsed in an unpublished thesis as a methodological justification for focusing especially on Bonhoeffer's middle period. See Jordan J. Ballor, "Barth, Brunner, and Natural Theology in Bonhoeffer's Middle Period (1931-1939)," (Th.M. thesis: Calvin Theological Seminary, 2004), 2-9.

Together as his most significant contribution to theology and church."[41]

One of the important conclusions to draw from the problem of periodization is that a thorough study of Bonhoeffer's relationship to natural law must take into account the contours of his biography. This means neither ignoring nor absolutely privileging any period as absolutely definitive. If greater weight must be given to the substantive and lengthy middle period, so too must his early and later works be taken into account. This problem of periodization must be kept in mind, for instance, when attempting to ascertain the continuities and discontinuities between formulations like "orders of preservation" in *Creation and Fall* (1933) and "divine mandates" in the much later *Ethics*. As Brian Gregor and Jens Zimmerman rightly contend, contemporary audiences must be encouraged "to read Bonhoeffer's oeuvre as a whole—not only for the sake of reading him accurately and minimizing misinterpretations, but also because this will deepen the understanding of the philosophical and theological roots supporting his more popular writings, as well as his political witness."[42]

In fact, the scholarship that does largely substantiate a positive connection between Bonhoeffer and natural law has been limited insofar as it has not pursued this connection as part of a inclusive investigative agenda. There have been some studies that have read Bonhoeffer in a way that correctly recognizes and values his position with respect to natural law (contra Barth), but none of these have done so in a comprehensive way.[43] And

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[41] Dudzus, "Discipleship and Worldliness," 230. Tim Keller's foreword to Metaxas' biography is representative of this kind of perspective. See Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

[42] Gregor and Zimmerman, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Cruciform Philosophy," 17.

[43] On some fundamental discontinuities between Barth and Bonhoeffer, see Paul D. Janz,

as already mentioned, other studies have looked at Bonhoeffer in connection with approaches related to natural law, such as virtue ethics, but not made a sustained substantive connection with natural law.[44]

So even where such studies are largely correct in their readings of Bonhoeffer's position, the limits of their appropriation of his work have prevented their readings from making larger inroads either into broader scholarly assessment of Bonhoeffer or the resurgent conversation over Protestantism and natural law. Louis Midgley's discussion of Bonhoeffer and Barth in relation to natural law is brief and focuses exclusively on the *Ethics*.[45] William F. Connor helpfully addresses the question of natural theology at some length, although he too works especially with the *Ethics*.[46] Particularly valuable, however, is Connor's thorough engagement with the early scholarship on Bonhoeffer.[47] Larry L.

"Bonhoeffer, This-Worldliness, and the Limits of Phenomenology," in *Bonhoeffer and Continental Thought*, 52-54. See also Henry Mottu, "Feuerbach and Bonhoeffer: Criticism of Religion and the Last Period of Bonhoeffer's Thought," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 25, no. 1 (1969): 1-18. Contra Mottu, see Wüstenberg, "Philosophical Influences on Bonhoeffer's 'Religionless Christianity,'" 144-146.

[44] See Moberly, *The Virtue of Bonhoeffer's Ethics*; and Walton Padelford, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Business Ethics* (Mountain Home: BorderStone, 2011). See also more generally Joel D. Biermann, *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014). For the traditional Lutheran linkage of virtue ethics and natural law, see Niels Hemmingsen, "On the Law of Nature in the Three States of Life and the Proofs that this Law Is Summarized in the Decalogue," trans. Eric J. Hutchinson, *Journal of Markets & Morality* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 643: "As, moreover, virtue unites the minds of men to each other and adapts them to one another's mutual uses, as has been said, so vice alienates the minds of men and turns them away from one another's mutual uses. Therefore, as nature dictates that the former must be sought, so this same teacher [Cicero] instructs us that the latter must be avoided."

[45] Louis C. Midgley, "Karl Barth and Natural Law," *Natural Law Forum* 13 (1968): 121-26.

[46] William F. Connor, "The Natural Life of Man and its Laws: Conscience and Reason in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer" (Ph.D. diss.: Vanderbilt University, 1973).

[47] Connor's engagement with Benkt-Erik Benktson, *Christus und die Religion: Der Religionsbegriff bei Berth, Bonhoeffer und Tillich*, trans. from the Swedish by Christa Maria

Rasmussen's study recognized the cosmic implications of Bonhoeffer's Christology for his ethical thought: "The ontological-cosmological reality of the world is already endowed with a universal christological character ('the reality of God in the world') that only awaits the proper stimulus in order to become realized. This bringing to realization of the world's essential character is, for Bonhoeffer, the heart of the ethical life."[48] The connection between the mandates and God's command is also clear: "The mandates are definite, circumscribed historical forms of the *Gestalt Christi*."[49] And while he draws on a range of sources from Bonhoeffer's work, Rasmussen focuses on developing Bonhoeffer's Christological ethics within an exploration of Bonhoeffer's participation in the resistance, and so his conclusions remain somewhat contextual. Perhaps the most notable reading of Bonhoeffer's views of natural law is contained in Robin Lovin's study, *Christian Faith and Public Choices*.[50] But given the purpose of Lovin's work, which is largely salutary and a worthy corrective to much of the misunderstandings in Bonhoeffer scholarship, the engagement with Bonhoeffer takes the form of a relatively brief survey rather than a comprehensive analysis of natural-law themes in Bonhoeffer's entire body of work.

Lyckhage and Erika Goldbach (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1967); and Rainer Mayer, *Christuswirklichkeit: Grundlage, Entwicklung und Konsequenzen der Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1969), is especially helpful.

[48] Larry L. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 23.

[49] Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, 30.

[50] Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Faith and Public Choices: The Social Teachings of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 126-158.

Method and Argument

This present study will address this lacuna and explore the relationship between Bonhoeffer and natural law in two basic ways. First, Bonhoeffer's life and work will be set into the broader intellectual context of the development of natural law thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (ch. 2). This survey will show that by the time Bonhoeffer enters the academic world in the late 1920s, the concept of natural law has undergone a radical shift from its meaning in the Reformation and post-Reformation period. In particular, the concept of natural law was constricted, becoming increasingly identified with the Roman Catholic revival of Thomism and the rationalistic capitulations of liberal Protestantism. By the end of the nineteenth century, in short, natural law becomes identified with neo-Thomism and neo-Protestantism, and therefore ceases to be understood as a viable option for authentic Protestant ethical thought.

After establishing this background, I will proceed to explore natural law and the development of neoorthodoxy, as well as Bonhoeffer's basic structures of ethical thought (ch. 3), illustrating the fundamental connections between these structures and a modified form of Protestant natural-law ethics. These basic categories of ethical reflection will receive further elaboration through exploration of Bonhoeffer's social thought in four main areas: marriage and family (ch. 4), workd and culture (ch. 5), church (ch. 6), and government (ch. 7). These chapters will each consist of two parts. In the first, I will describe the ways that Bonhoeffer's modified appropriations of the older approaches to natural law inform and influence his general teaching on these basic ethical mandates. In the second part of each chapter I will develop Bonhoeffer's ethical insights within the context of more particular issues of particular contemporary relevance and, in some cases,

conflict. For example, in the context of Bonhoeffer's views of family and marriage I will treat what Bonhoeffer says about the compelling moral issues of divorce and abortion. In these latter sections my hope is to engage and constructively apply Bonhoeffer's ethical thought for the purpose of advancing our understanding of contemporary questions. At the conclusion of these chapters we will have in hand both a general picture of Bonhoeffer's ethical thought as well as some specific ways that his views might positively inform contemporary conversations.

The conclusion (ch. 8) will summarize the findings of the study and their importance, pointing out in particular some of the implications of this revised picture of Bonhoeffer, both for our understanding of his broader theology and for the development of Protestant social thought today. I noted at the beginning of this introduction James Gustafson's summary of the situation nearly forty years ago regarding Protestantism and natural law. At that time Gustafson wondered provocatively, "Why don't Protestants use the cosmic christologies of Colossians, Ephesians, and the gospel according to John for a biblical foundation for natural law?"[51] As this study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and natural law shows, the establishment of a conception of natural law rooted in the biblical conception of Christ's cosmic lordship is precisely the work that Bonhoeffer began, and made remarkable progress on, during his relatively brief theological career. Thus Craig Slane writes, "As ontological, Christ's centrality pervades the various modes of what theologians conveniently dub 'general revelation'; Christ is the center of human existence, history, and nature."[52] As Eric Metaxas puts it quite starkly in his popular biography,

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[51] Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics*, 71.

[52] Craig Slane, *Bonhoeffer as Martyr: Social Responsibility and Modern Christian*

Bonhoeffer's composition of his *Ethics* was informed by his recognition that natural law had been "absent from Protestant theology," and this was an absence "he meant to correct."[53] In order to build on Bonhoeffer's work in this regard we must first understand more comprehensively understand Bonhoeffer's characteristic ethical teaching of the divine mandates and how this relates to natural law.

A helpful way to understand the traditional Protestant approaches to natural law is to recognize, as Grabill puts it, "the logical thread" connecting the doctrines of natural revelation, natural theology, and natural law.[54] As J. Daryl Charles puts it succinctly, "Natural law is the moral aspect of the penetrating arrow of general revelation."[55] What I

Commitment (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 175.

[53] Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr, Spy*, 372. My review of Metaxas' work appears as, "The Many Bonhoeffers," *The City,* Fall 2010, 86-89. Metaxas' work has been criticized by scholars, with some justification. See, for instance, Clifford Green, "Hijacking Bonhoeffer," *The Christian Century*, October 5, 2010. Much of the criticism, however, arises from the error of holding a non-scholarly work to a higher academic standard. The criticism also has to do with a perceived purpose of construing Bonhoeffer in a fashion acceptable for North American evangelicalism. And while there is some merit in this concern, Metaxas' work can largely be viewed as a helpful corrective to decades of scholarship that has labored to portray Bonhoeffer as a modernist, radical, or liberation theologian of some kind. In recognizing natural law in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, Metaxas' straightforward approach has allowed him to avoid the errors of partisan theological interpretation by previous scholars. On Bonhoeffer as an "evangelical," see Georg Huntemann, *Der Andere Bonhoeffer: Die Herausforderung des Modernismus* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1989); ET: *The Other Bonhoeffer: An Evangelical Reassessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Todd Huizinga (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); and Richard Weikart, *The Myth of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Is His Theology Evangelical?* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1997). See also Cornelius Van Til, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Review Article," *Westminster Theological Journal* 34, no. 2 (May 1972): 152-173. Timothy Larsen describes Van Til's review as a "maniacal and deranged attack." See Larsen, "The Evangelical Reception of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 44.

[54] Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 21. For an earlier statement of Bonhoeffer's cosmic Christology in the context of his doctrine of creation and the implications for natural theology, see Jordan J. Ballor, "Christ in Creation: Bonhoeffer's Orders of Preservation and the Question of Natural Theology," *Journal of Religion* 86, no. 1 (January 2006): 1-22.

[55] Charles, *Retrieving the Natural Law*, 130.

mean, then, in describing Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a natural-law thinker, is most basically that he held to a form of moral realism, a divinely-instituted order of moral obligation, adhering to all human beings, communicated through the basic structures of the created order. For Bonhoeffer this moral order takes the form of what he calls variously "orders of preservation," "laws of life," and later the "divine mandates."[56] Characteristic of Bonhoeffer's conception of the moral order is its orientation to and grounding in Jesus Christ.

Equally important, however, to understanding the general doctrinal connections between teachings like natural theology and natural law is appreciation and attention to the characteristically Lutheran ways of articulating these teachings. That is, natural law teachings assume a variety of forms and use a variety of distinctive terminology depending on the particular tradition and context. Lutherans, for instance, are often much more apt to talk about "creation orders" or "estates" than "natural law" as such.[57] But creation orders and the doctrine of the estates are properly understood as natural-law constructions, even if the term "natural law" itself never (or rarely) appears. The formulations of creation and preservation orders is the language of natural law in Protestant, and particularly Lutheran, terminology. If the "orders of creation" is a Lutheran construal of natural law, then Bonhoeffer's "orders of preservation" and "divine mandates" are developments of distinctive Lutheran formulations.

Thus Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ethical thought comes to mature expression in his

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[56] On the *Lebensgesetz*, see William F. Connor, "The Laws of Life: A Bonhoeffer Theme with Variations," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1977): 101-10.

[57] See, for instance, Armin Wenz, "Natural Law and the Orders of Creation," in *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*, 79-95.

doctrine of the divine mandates, or the structures of the divine commandment. This approach is Bonhoeffer's particular and characteristic modification and constructive application of received Lutheran teaching on the orders of creation.[58] Stephen J. Plant's conclusions hold for Bonhoeffer's biblical as well as his moral theology: "We can grasp little of Bonhoeffer's originality until we see it essentially as biblical exegesis undertaken from within a confessionally Augustinian and Lutheran tradition."[59] In a characteristically Lutheran emphasis, Bonhoeffer's mandates find their basis in the living person of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the moral law. Understood properly, Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the mandates is best represented as grounded in a form of *Christological natural law*, or as describing what might be called a *Christotelic* order, with Christ as the ultimate end and norm for the mandates. Jesus Christ is the origin, essence, and end of the natural law.

In this way the starting point of Bonhoeffer's ethical thought is Christ himself. He writes, "The *subject matter of a Christian ethic is God's reality revealed in Christ becoming real* [*Wirklichwerden*] *among God's creatures*, just as the subject matter of doctrinal theology is the truth of God's reality revealed in Christ."[60] The primary element

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[58] DeJonge, *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation*, is one of the notable works that appreciates how deeply rooted Bonhoeffer's thought is in traditional Lutheran theological categories. Although DeJonge compares Bonhoeffer and Barth as typifying Lutheran and Reformed theological method respectively, we can affirm the veracity of DeJonge's general approach with respect to Bonhoeffer without admitting that the judgment concerning Barth is similarly justified. For Bonhoeffer as a confessional theologian, see Richard H. Bliese, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 – 1945)," in *Twentieth-Century Lutheran Theologians*, ed. Mark C. Mattes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 223-248. As for Barth's Reformed confessional identity, see Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowdin (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1976), 211: "Barth did not want to write dogmatics in the tradition of any confession."

[59] Stephen J. Plant, "The Evangelization of Rulers: Bonhoeffer's Political Theology," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, 81.

[60] DBWE 6:6:49.

of “God’s reality revealed in Christ becoming real” is the lordship of Christ manifested over all of creation. Thus Bonhoeffer writes, “Christ is the center and power of the Bible, of the church, of theology, but also of humanity, reason, justice, and culture. To Christ everything must return; only under Christ’s protection can it live,” and, “The more exclusively we recognize and confess Christ as our Lord, the more will be disclosed to us the breadth of Christ’s lordship.”[61] For Bonhoeffer, the distinguishing characteristic of a truly *Christian* ethic is its origination from and orientation to Christ.

Even so, Bonhoeffer is greatly concerned with rightly valuing the created and fallen world. This means that the so-called “natural” is neither to be absolutized nor marginalized. He writes, “We speak of the natural as distinct from the created, in order to include the fact of the fall into sin. We speak of the natural as distinct from the sinful in order to include the created.” Bonhoeffer defines the natural as “that which after the fall, is directed toward the coming of Jesus Christ. The unnatural is that which, after the fall, closes itself off from the coming of Jesus Christ.”[62] Here we see explicitly the “natural” positively linked with “Christ.” In distinguishing the *primal* or *created* from the *natural* Bonhoeffer is trying to establish what is particularly distinctive in his conception of orders of *creation* as opposed to orders of *preservation*. This distinction is, indeed, a characteristic feature of Bonhoeffer’s ethical thought that will receive greater scrutiny as this study proceeds. For Bonhoeffer the basic theological problem of nature and grace can be articulated in the formula *Christ consummates creation*. This latter formulation makes the person of Christ, rather than a potentially abstract grace, and the theologically-rich doctrine

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[61] DBWE 6:341, 344.

[62] DBWE 6:173.

of vocation, rather than a potentially abstract nature, the foci of our understanding. The idea of consummation embeds an understanding of intentional agency and *telos* that are not necessarily present in the mere idea of transformation.

Christ's lordship is exercised over in the fallen world through four distinct "mandates," namely, marriage (or family), culture (or work), church, and government. These are the expressions of God's "commandment," which is "the sole authorization for ethical discourse."[63] As noted above, however, the commandment is linked to Christ, so that "the commandment of God revealed in Jesus Christ is addressed to us in the church, in the family, in work, and in government."[64] Thus the Christological mandates are the substantial reconciliation of divine command with natural law. The lordship of Christ over all creation cannot allow Christ to be "a partial reality alongside others." Bonhoeffer writes, "The world belongs to Christ, and only in Christ is the world what it is. It needs, therefore, nothing less than Christ himself. Everything would be spoiled if we were to reserve Christ for the church while granting the world only some law, Christian though it may be. Christ has died for the world, and Christ is Christ only in the midst of the world."[65] The key point here is that Bonhoeffer is not willing to cede some portion of existence as having a purely secular or ontologically autonomous character.

In the course of this study it will become quite apparent that Bonhoeffer's approach sketched briefly here represents a significant departure from the received wisdom arising out of the debates of the nineteenth century, whether that of neo-Thomists or

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[63] DBWE 6:378.

[64] DBWE 6:380.

[65] DBWE 6:67.

neo-Protestants, or later that of Karl Barth. It is appropriate, then, to turn to the varied approaches to and attitudes toward natural law in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 2

NATURAL LAW IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The proximate background for the reception of natural law and ethical thought more generally before Barth is the complex philosophical and theological developments of the nineteenth century. Although there was great diversity in the Christian West beforehand, by the end of the eighteenth century a broad consensus had largely been disrupted. Although it is common to point to the sixteenth century and the Protestant Reformation as a critical point of disjunction in the ethical views among Christian traditions, a far more significant and far-reaching point of departure occurs centuries later as a classical, largely Aristotelian, consensus is abandoned. Alongside the so-called "second scholasticism," a period of renewed engagement among Roman Catholics with classical medieval sources in law, theology, and philosophy, both Lutheran and Reformed orthodox scholastic traditions arose and developed from the sixteenth, through the seventeenth, and into the eighteenth centuries.[1]

The historical study of scholasticism in the Renaissance and Reformation eras, what is sometimes broadly termed "Christian Aristotelianism," has helped to clarify some of the contours of the rise, flourishing, and fall of this dominant and variegated Western intellectual tradition.[2] Thus Richard A. Muller writes, "Just as the continuity of Christian

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[1] See the discussion of "second scholasticism" by J. E. Gurr, in NCE1 12:1158-1165, s.v. "Scholasticism." Among the Reformed, see Willem J. Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011). For Lutheran scholasticism, see Kenneth G. Appold, "Academic Life and Teaching in Post-Reformation Lutheranism," in *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture: 1550-1675*, ed. Robert Kolb (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 65-115.

[2] See, for instance, Richard A. Muller, "Reformation, Orthodoxy, 'Christian

Aristotelianism is characteristic of the historical path of Western philosophy from the thirteenth through the seventeenth centuries, so the continuity of a dialectical and argumentative scholastic method is a feature of both Catholic and Protestant theological system during the same period."[3]

With respect to natural-law teachings in particular, there is no radical departure in the sixteenth century from the perspectives inherited from various medieval schools of thought. As John T. McNeill rightly argued, "There is no real discontinuity between the teaching of the Reformers and that of their predecessors with respect to natural law."[4] The truth of this observation should be understood to refer not simply to some univocal medieval doctrine of natural law, but rather to the complex diversity and complementarity of various conceptions of natural law arising out of the medieval period. In this way, various reformers were as apt to engage a Thomistic understanding of natural law as "the rational creature's participation of the eternal law" as a more widespread formula as that which defines natural law in terms of "right reason."[5]

The decline of Christian scholasticism at the dawn of the Enlightenment is a complex phenomenon that ranges far beyond the parameters of this study. A helpful point of departure, however, is to trace how the natural-law concept of "right reason" was

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Aristotelianism,' and the Eclecticism of Early Modern Philosophy,' *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 81 (2001): 306-325; and Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999).

[3] PRRD 1:52.

[4] John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," *Journal of Religion* 26, no. 3 (July 1946): 168.

[5] ST I-II, Q. 91.2; See more broadly Francis Oakley, *Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Ideas* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

displaced by a greater emphasis on human faculties, particularly reason in its various senses. As Muller writes, after 1725 Protestant orthodoxy was "increasingly influenced by various schools of rationalist philosophy."[6] Reformed orthodoxy writers had engaged various philosophical schools and positions, including Spinoza, Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke, with some variety of appreciation or aversion.[7] But as the eighteenth century progressed, a reversal occurred in which the preeminence of confessional orthodox theology was replaced in intellectual and scholastic life with various rationalist and heterodox philosophical approaches. Muller contends that it is "the Cartesian model that, in its more extreme forms, elevated reason over revelation," and that "in some cases, led to a departure from the balance of revelation and reason characteristic of the theology allied to the traditional Christian Aristotelianism."[8]

An aspect of the Cartesian model that is particularly noteworthy in setting the stage for much later developments in the nineteenth century is the codification of doubt as a methodological axiom.[9] The emergence of methodological doubt and the related phenomenon of skepticism created an epistemological crisis at by the dawn of the nineteenth century. The philosophical world was at a crossroads. The work of David Hume (1711-1776) had followed out the Enlightenment epistemological program to its final conclusion. Hume's demolition of natural theology based on arguments for God's existence had ended in a form of critical skepticism that was ill-suited for either orthodox

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[6] PRRD 1:82.

[7] See PRRD 2:121-129.

[8] PRRD 4:401.

[9] See Janet Broughton, *Descartes's Method of Doubt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Christianity or the rational Deism that had gained popularity in the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century was formed by a number of philosophers and related schools that addressed in different ways and with different emphases, the epistemological challenges arising out of such skepticism.

The following survey will highlight five of these traditions, ones that are most salient for establishing the proximate background to the situation in German thought at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is neither an exhaustive survey of these traditions nor a comprehensive survey of all the relevant philosophical and theological trends. Philosophical schools particularly influential in the Anglophone world, for instance, including Scottish common sense realism, utilitarianism, and classical liberalism, must be omitted. The goal in this chapter is simply to highlight, in broad strokes, the relevant approaches to questions of natural knowledge and morality that form the backdrop for the rise of neo-orthodoxy. The survey will proceed by exploring the significance of (1) Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and neo-Kantianism, (2) George Wilehlm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and German Idealism, (3) Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and neo-Protestantism, (4) Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) and the revival of Thomism among Roman Catholics, and historically the last of these movements to arise, (5) Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and neo-Calvinism.

Kant and Neo-Kantianism

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) credited Hume with waking him from his "dogmatic slumber." And while Kant's major works were published in the latter half of the eighteenth century, his response to Hume set the stage for following thinkers.

Faced with the skepticism of David Hume, Immanuel Kant's strategy involved at least two basic moves. First, Kant embraced the conclusions Hume had reached, that there is a noetic separation between the essence or nature of things and what we can observe and know about them. But instead of resting in the skepticism resulting from an empiricist epistemology, which had dominated from Locke to Hume, Kant argued against the passivity of the human mind. In response to Hume, seeking to set his metaphysics "on firm footing," Kant "proposed a bold hypothesis: The mind is 'active' in the knowing process. Knowledge of the external world, he argued, cannot be derived from sense experience alone. The senses merely furnish the raw data that the mind systematizes when actual knowing occurs." Instead of viewing the mind as a blank slate (*tabula rasa*), there are "certain formal concepts present in the mind, which act as a type of grid or filter providing the parameters that make knowing possible."[10]

This is Kant's so-called "Copernican revolution" in epistemology, in which the mind of the human subject is held to condition the perception of sensory objects. As Livingston states, "The raw material of experience is thus molded and shaped along certain definite lines according to the cognitive forms within the mind itself. These forms of the mind, such as space, time, causality, and substance, are the categories we use to 'put things together.'"[11] These concepts are necessary and foundational for human knowing, and function to define and delimit what can be known.

Building from this Kant makes a second move in an attempt to connect "pure" and

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[10] Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1992), 27.

[11] James C. Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 2d ed., vol. 1, *Modern Christian Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 49.

"practical" reason. For Kant, as John W. Cooper puts it, "pure" or "theoretical reason explains what things are," while practical reason "tells us how we should live."[12] The forms of the mind determine the way in which pure reason functions noetically. But these concepts or forms raise questions that pure reason cannot answer through the observation and perception of phenomena. As Hendrikus Berkhof puts it, "Pure reason simply cannot avoid producing transcendental ideas which have no starting point in observation. Indeed, it cannot but think the unity of itself (as soul), of its object (as world), and of all objects of thought in general (as God)."[13]

Kant's key innovation here is to use these transcendental ideas as a way to connect pure and practical reason, the latter of which he judged to be the seat of a particular kind of certainty. Livingston writes, "Kant came to recognize that the human mind finds itself in the peculiar situation of being burdened by certain metaphysical questions which it is unable to ignore but which also appear to transcend the mind's power to answer," at least by means of pure reason alone.[14]

Thus the burden is thrust upon practical reason to provide practical noetic certainty. Kant identified three "practical postulates" that had to be assumed for the efficacy of practical reason, but which could not be proved by pure reason. The first of these postulates is the concept of God, who functions as lawgiver and judge. The second is the immortality of the soul, which is necessary given the imperfect moral nature of human beings. The soul

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[12] John W. Cooper, *Panentheism—The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 91.

[13] Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2.

[14] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 58.

must be immortal in order to survive long enough to reach moral perfection. And the final postulate is free will, conceived as the ability to freely choose moral good or evil. This reality, defined as "the capacity to reject the moral law," undergirded the moral culpability and therefore moral agency of human beings.[15]

Each of these postulates is in its own way confirmed by practical reason. Kant believed that these postulates were "required by the moral nature of the world," which was a self-evident truth.[16] Livingston says that for Kant, "our moral nature *demands* the reality of the objects of religious belief. They are moral *postulates*; that is, logically required by our acknowledgment of the implications of a moral law which is a 'fact of reason.'"[17] Given human beings moral nature, argues Kant, the immortal soul, God, and free will are practically necessary.

Korsgaard points to human freedom as the fundamental basis for Kant's linkage of the postulates to practical reason: "Kant has not shown that there is no God, immortality or freedom, but rather that these things are beyond the limits of theoretical understanding. Yet theoretical reason, in its search for the unconditioned—for the completeness of its account of things—compels us to ask whether these things are real."[18] Taking the moral nature of the universe as a first principle, a "fact of reason," Kant determines that human freedom of the will is entailed by the nature of morality itself. As Korsgaard writes, "freedom of the will is important to Kant not merely for the familiar reason that we cannot be held

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[15] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 63.

[16] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 29.

[17] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 63.

[18] Christine Korsgaard, "Kant," in *Ethics in the History of Western Philosophy*, ed. Robert J. Cavalier, James Gouinlock and James P. Sterba (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 207.

accountable if we are not free, but because it provides the content of morality and its motive."[19]

The will as a merely formal principle, with no material content, corresponds to the universality of duty: "The formal principle of duty is just that it is duty—that it is law. The essential character of law is universality. Therefore, the person who acts from duty attends to the universality of his/her principle."[20] All humans by nature have purposes and ends. Kant thus does hold to a basic idea of natural law or moral obligation. So "because each of us holds his/her own ends to be good, each of us regards his/her own humanity as a source of value. In consistency, we must attribute the same kind of value to the humanity of others. These considerations establish humanity as the objective end needed for the determination of the will by a categorical imperative."[21] The faculty of practical reason therefore not only requires a free will and the (immortal) human self, but "if there were a God, then, the Highest Good would be possible, and morality would not direct us to impossible ends. Since we must obey the moral law, and therefore must adopt the Highest Good as our end, we need to believe that end is possible. So we need to believe in what will make that possible. This is not a contingent need, based on an arbitrary desire, but 'a need of pure reason'. This provides a pure practical reason for belief in God."[22] Kant puts it this way, speaking of pure reason, "those concepts which otherwise it had to look upon as

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[19] Korsgaard, "Kant," 209.

[20] Korsgaard, "Kant," 211. Korsgaard also writes, "The will is a causality, and the concept of a causality entails laws: a causality which functions randomly is a contradiction. To put it another way, the will is practical reason, and we cannot conceive a practical reason that chooses and acts for no reason," p. 222.

[21] Korsgaard, "Kant," 214.

[22] Korsgaard, "Kant," 226-27.

problematical (merely thinkable) concepts, are now shown assertorically to be such as actually have objects; because practical reason indispensibly requires their existence for the possibility of its object, the *summum bonum*, which practically is absolutely necessary, and this justifies theoretical reason in assuming them."[23]

But these realities are practically necessary only as implications. Berkhof writes, "The postulates of practical reason are final concepts, which do not release further possibilities for new developments from within them. They stem from the moral world and serve only that world. For that reason the concept of God must be understood, noetically, as an appendix to human morality and hence as a derived concept."[24] Kant has set out to achieve practical certainty, having accepted the cogency of Hume's denial of theoretical certainty. Belief in God, immortality, and the willing self are practically necessary for explaining the existence of an objective moral order, and therefore belief in these realities is subjectively rational. This methodology has implications for the content that each of the postulates receives.

Hume had shown cogently that a theistic argument from design, for instance, could not be construed as theoretical proof of the existence of a single deity, much less the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The characteristics necessary for simply designing the world are not co-identical with those of traditional Christian orthodoxy. In the same way, Kant "affirmed only those metaphysical postulates that he saw as necessary to account for that dimension of human existence (such as God, immortality and freedom). By extension of

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[23] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, 5th ed. (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898), II.VII, p. 232.

[24] Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 8.

this methodology, he ascribed to the divine nature only the attributes necessary for God as moral guarantor."[25] Limited as he was for arguing for the reality of the postulates from practical reason, "Kant, therefore, could claim no knowledge of the divine nature beyond the moral dimension."[26] But this does mean that Kant could ascribe attributes to God as "an Author of the world possessed *of the highest perfection*," such as omniscience, omnipotence, and so on, in order to be adequate to judge internal moral faculties and enact appropriate punishment or reward.[27]

In this way, Kant "did not ground morality in theology, as in classical Christian thinking, but theology in morality." [28] Another way of putting it is that Kant held to a "consistent subordination of religion to morality" and that "what interested him was not religion but God as guarantor of morality and of the ultimate harmony of nature and spirit (*Geist*)."[29] The classical grounding of natural law in divine reality was thus inverted by Kant. The existence and relevance of God was grounded in natural moral obligation.

Kant ushered in a new era of philosophical and theological reflection, of which Hegel and Schleiermacher were leading followers. Livingston writes, "Kant's importance for modern theology lies in the fact that he both extended Hume's critique of traditional natural theology *and* laid the theoretical groundwork for an entirely new approach to

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[25] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 30-31.

[26] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 31.

[27] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, II.VII, p. 238.

[28] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 31.

[29] Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 11.

theology."[30] Kant's unwillingness to attribute qualities to God other than what were strictly necessary for his form of moral law lead to the neo-Kantian notion, held by Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) and further radicalized by Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), that the world religions are to be judged purely by the practical results of their doctrines and their conformity to an axiomatic moral order.

Hegel and German Idealism

Following Kant's response to Hume, in the next generation Hegel attempted to ground philosophical knowledge in the workings of theoretical or speculative reason. Influenced decisively by the early philosophy of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854), Hegel worked out a system of philosophy based on a form of dialectical idealism. In traditional logic, the thesis A and its antithesis -A are contradictory; either A or -A can be true, but not both. In dialectical logic, however, the conflict between A and -A is resolved methodologically by an appeal to a synthesis B, which captures and suspends (sublates) the truths inherent in both original thesis and antithesis. B, in turn, has an antithesis in -B, which are then sublated into C, and so on. The final comprehensive synthesis is Z, in which "Z is shown to be the one, infinite, absolute, and necessary proposition, but it includes all the many, finite, relative, and contingent propositions."[31]

This dialectic is constitutive of theoretical reason. We are able to overcome seeming dichotomies in language, perception, and experience by the process of dialectical ratiocination. But Hegel did not limit the applicability of his dialectic to the workings of

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[30] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 58.

[31] Cooper, *Panentheism—The Other God of the Philosophers*, 110.

human reason. Instead, he saw dialectic as “both a law of thought and of metaphysics. The dialectic relates to the process of reality itself, which reveals the Absolute coming to self-awareness.”[32] That is, dialectic constitutes not only how we come to know (epistemology) but the nature of being and existence itself (ontology).

Hegelian dialectic can thus be used to interpret history is such a way that our knowledge corresponds to reality. In this way, “Hegel thought that reality is active and developing. It is an ongoing process that consists of the actual unfolding of the principle of rationality. Not only is reality logical (as the Enlightenment thinkers believed), logic is in a sense reality, he asserted, for what is rational is actual.”[33] This unfolding principle of rationality in the world is to be understood as the divine Spirit.

Hegel’s dialectic “relates to the process of reality itself, which reveals the Absolute coming to self-awareness.” [34] A look at the history of the world can confirm this process of self-realization and self-manifestation. For Hegel, “The different epochs in human history are the stages through which Spirit passes enroute to self-discovery. Hence, truth is history—viewed not as the isolated facts, but as the grand unity lying behind and revealed in the ongoing historical process. Knowledge, in turn, lies in the philosophical mastery of the patterns produced by the historical process, the grasping of the meaning of the whole.”[35] It is at this point, in Hegel’s emphasis on history, that his focus on the religion in general and Christianity in particular becomes definitive.

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[32] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 35.

[33] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 33.

[34] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 35.

[35] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 34.

Religion, after all, is to be understood as the epoch of human development and consciousness that first and definitively captured the essence of the divine Spirit. Religion has its proper place that ought to be respected, insofar as it paves the way for the rational apprehension of the truth it represents. Hegel thus says, "In religion the truth has been revealed as far as its content is concerned; but it is another matter for this content to be present in the form of the concept, of thinking, of the concept in speculative form."[36] Cooper writes that for Hegel, "Religion is where the general self-actualization of God in history is most explicit. God exists in nature and human history, but religion, particularly in its myths and symbols, is where humans become aware of the God who personalizes himself in nature and humanity."[37] But not all religions communicate this divine self-actualization equally well.

In the concreteness of Christianity, linked to the actual historical manifestation of the God-man, Hegel finds the core religious expression of the Spiritual dialectic. The Trinity represents the religious and specifically Christian attempt to give formal expression to the Spiritual dialectic as the rational principle underlying the universe. The Father, the Thesis, "the One, the όν, is the abstract element that is expressed as the abyss, the depth (i.e., precisely what is still empty), the inexpressible, the inconceivable, that which is beyond all concepts."[38] The evil of separation represented by humanity, in both its creaturely finitude and sinful unhappiness, is overcome in Christ: "the suffering and death

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[36] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Consummate Religion*, vol. 3, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 283.

[37] Cooper, *Panentheism—The Other God of the Philosophers*, 104.

[38] Hegel, *The Consummate Religion*, 288.

of Christ superseded his human relationships, and it is precisely in his death that the transition into the religious sphere occurs."[39] As Livingston puts it, "Christ's unique God-manhood, Hegel believes, is posited upon the speculative Idea, upon Hegel's conception of Absolute Truth. This very Idea demands that the implicit truth be historically manifest."[40] The stage of the Absolute Spirit dawns in philosophy, insofar as "this reconciliation is philosophy. Philosophy is to this extent theology. It presents the reconciliation of God with himself and with nature, showing that nature, otherness, is implicitly divine, and that the raising of itself to reconciliation is on the one hand what finite spirit implicitly is, while on the other hand it arrives at this reconciliation, or brings it forth, in world history."[41]

In this way Hegel "pondered the historical components of an essential element of the Christian faith, and he strove to understand and ground it philosophically."[42] In contrast from his understanding of Kant's use of Christianity, for Hegel "the truth of Christianity, therefore, is not to be reduced to certain abstract principles but seen in the historical actualization of the unity of the divine and human and the coming into being of the Absolute Spirit."[43] So for Hegel, as for Schleiermacher, "Christianity is the Consummate Religion, for in Christianity alone do we see the actual dialectical process by

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[39] Hegel, *The Consummate Religion*, 322.

[40] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 124.

[41] Hegel, *The Consummate Religion*, 347.

[42] Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 50.

[43] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 121.

which Spirit (God) works itself out to full expression in history."[44] Hegel's correlation of human dialectical rationality and the ontological dialectic of Father:Son:Spirit led him to focus on history as a key to philosophical interpretation in a way that he found lacking in other systems.

But it is this same emphasis on the dynamically active Absolute Spirit that in the end must transcend such historical concerns. For while "truth is history—viewed not as the isolated facts, but as the grand unity lying behind and revealed in the ongoing historical process," so too does knowledge lie "in the philosophical mastery of the patterns produced by the historical process, the grasping of the meaning of the whole."[45] The historical moment of "God's death on the cross," for instance, is emblematic of the entire realm of history; it is "only a transitional moment in the emergence of Absolute Spirit."[46] The historical itself is finally transcended or synthesized into the higher realm of speculative reason. With this ontological outworking of Spirit, we have the fullness of Hegel's dialectical method. Returning to the comprehensive final synthesis, "If Z is not merely an idea but the self-comprehending mind of God, then all things are in God and panentheism is fully real and fully rational."[47]

Hegel's dialectic could be understood as a kind of natural law, but Hegel also affirmed a doctrine of natural law related to ethics. Thus, wrote Hegel, "natural law bears directly on the ethical, the mover of all things human." Hegel likewise affirmed ethics as a

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[44] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 125.

[45] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 34.

[46] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 124.

[47] Cooper, *Panentheism—The Other God of the Philosophers*, 110.

science, a way of rational knowing, and consonant with his dialectical method, identified the necessary expression of the ethical shape of natural law as "the form of universality."[48] In this way, Hegel is interested in determining the universal, abstract, essential character of natural law that transcends particular concerns and empirical methods. He rejects, therefore, the "moral formalism" of the Jesuits, which deal casuistically with probabilities, as well as more classical Aristotelian "Eudaemonism."[49] Just as the absolute Spirit comes to realization more broadly through the Idealist dialectic, so too has "the world-spirit … enjoyed itself and its own essence in every nation under every system of laws and customs."[50]

As Berkhof states, "The Spirit guides human beings out of the world of the historical into the truth, truth in the form of the eternal fixity of concept."[51] It is this cyclical movement into and out of the historical that leads Berkhof to judge that while "more than other idealistic thinkers, Hegel tried to let the phenomenal world participate in the truth of reason," Hegel still "did not succeed in bringing about a genuine synthesis between the two."[52]

Hegel's legacy involved a conservative (right-wing) and a radical (left-wing) construal of his thought. The left-wing Hegelians like Feuerbach were inclined to add one

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[48] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 58.

[49] Hegel, *Natural Law*, 70, 79.

[50] Hegel, *Natural Law*, 127.

[51] Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 54.

[52] Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 57.

more anti-thesis to Hegel's grand synthesis and view humans as the projecting source of divinity rather than the other way around. But Hegel and Idealism in general also sparked a reactionary movement inaugurated by Kierkegaard (indebted to Kant in his own way), which criticized Idealism for abstracting existence into a mere idea. As James Brown puts the existential critique, "Existence steadily resists dissipation into purely ideal factors: Hegel has not incorporated existence into his system, contends Kierkegaard, but only the idea of existence. He has not brought becoming into thought, for all his talk of dialectical process and the self-realization of the absolute spirit in the life of finite human spirits in history."[53]

Schleiermacher and Neo-Protestantism

In contrast with Kant's placement of religion as dependent on morality, and Hegel's grounding of divine reality in history and speculative transcendence, Schleiermacher held that religion was the result of a direct experiential reality. For Schleiermacher, "religion is no derivative; on the contrary, it is expressive of the 'immediacy of feeling.' It springs from a level higher than objectivizing or acting reason—a level where the unity of life is experienced in an inner unity that is prior to the subject-object distinction."[54] Kant held human nature to be fundamentally moral, but Schleiermacher found it to be essentially religious. This religious nature is grounded in the point of contact (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) between the divine and the human.

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[53] James Brown, *Subject and Object in Modern Theology: The Croall Lectures Given in the University of Edinburgh 1953* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 41. Cf. Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 54.

[54] Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 31.

This point of contact is the internal religious intuition, which Schleiermacher identifies ultimately as the "feeling of absolute dependence." Cooper describes Schleiermacher's approach thusly: "Schleiermacher acknowledges the validity of Kant's theological agnosticism but attempts to overcome it in a most un-Kantian way—by rooting knowledge of God in our immediate experience."[55] Where Kant had emphasized doing, and Hegel had emphasized knowing, Schleiermacher argued that there was a third fundamental human faculty that had been overlooked and obscured in such discussions: feeling. For Schleiermacher, "there are three essential elements in all mental life: perception, feeling, and activity. Perception issues in knowledge; activity in the conduct of the moral life; feeling is the peculiar faculty of the religious life."[56] Religious experience is *sui generis* and irreducible to either morality or theoretical rationality.[57]

Schleiermacher defines human "feeling" as having equal standing with "knowing" and "doing."[58] Feeling is for Schleiermacher a form of self-consciousness corresponding to an object of inner or outer sensitivity. This self-consciousness is characterized by "two elements, which we might call respectively a self-caused element (ein Sichelbstetzen) and a non-self-caused element (ein Sichelbstnichtsogesetzhaben); or a Being and a Having-by-some-means-come-to-be (ein Sein und ein Irgendwiegewordensein). The latter of these presupposes for every self-consciousness another factor besides the Ego, a factor which is the source of the particular determination, and without which the

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[55] Cooper, *Panentheism—The Other God of the Philosophers*, 84.

[56] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 96.

[57] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 95.

[58] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 11.

self-consciousness would not be precisely what it is."[59] This external factor is the Other which both defines and delimits the self. The religious feeling is that which corresponds to the absolute limitation of ourselves by another, which cannot occur in relation to other finite beings. The divine is the only reality that can cause in us a feeling of absolute rather than relative dependence.

In order to ground this argument, Schleiermacher posited the universality of such religious experience; "in every individual religion the God-consciousness, which in itself remains the same everywhere on the same level, is attached to some relation of the self-consciousness in such an especial way that only thereby can it unite with other determinations of the self-consciousness; so that all other relations are subordinate to this one, and it communicates to all others its colour and its tone."[60] In this manner he is concerned with the history of religion and religious experience, since "Schleiermacher believed that such a religious feeling (which he often called 'piety') is fundamental and universal in human experience."[61]

Like Hegel, however, Schleiermacher found the highest expression of the God-consciousness to be manifest in Christianity. Cooper observes that for Schleiermacher, "The Deity has actualized, exemplified, and communicated the self-conscious, God-conscious harmony of all things most fully in Jesus Christ, who is the perfect human realization and mediating source of God-consciousness in the communion

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[59] Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 13.

[60] Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 47.

[61] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 44.

of all with all."[62]

It is important for Schleiermacher to distinguish religious experience or consciousness and religious expression or response. The former are first-order realities, basically passive or "fully receptive," while the latter are second-order human reactions.[63] Calling this "one of his contributions to contemporary theology," Grenz and Olson note that "Schleiermacher believed that religious experience is primary; theology in turn is secondary."[64] Experience itself becomes normative for second-order religious and theological expression.

Livingstone writes that "after Schleiermacher, theology no longer felt obliged to vindicate itself at the court of science or of Kant's practical reason. Theology now had a new sense of its own self-authentication in experience, for, while it could no longer claim to be scientifically verified, its truth was now to be found in the symbolic rendering of the experiences of the life of feelings."[65] The result of this is that a sharp dichotomy is drawn between religious experience and rational knowing.

This sets up a situation in which "science and Christianity in principle cannot conflict. The former deals with proximate causes only, whereas the latter deals with the ultimate cause," or realities corresponding to relative versus absolute dependence.[66] Grenz and Olson compare the importance of Schleiermacher's perspective with Kant in saying

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[62] Cooper, *Panentheism—The Other God of the Philosophers*, 87.

[63] Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 47.

[64] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 46.

[65] Livingston, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 105.

[66] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 48.

that “Schleiermacher’s theological method might also be called a ‘Copernican revolution.’… Schleiermacher suggested that the impasse between rationalism and orthodoxy could be solved if human experience—specifically the feeling of absolute dependency—rather than authoritative propositions about God were to be seen as the source of theology.”[67]

Although Schleiermacher sharply disagreed with Kant and Hegel on the relation of religion, reason, and morality, the three shared a basic method in moving from human concerns to divine. Berkhof writes, “Schleiermacher took his point of departure in reason, that is, in *the self-consciousness of human beings*. In that sense he totally belonged to his own time and to the modern period as it has been stamped by the motifs of the Enlightenment.”[68] This “point of departure in reason,” rather than say, revelation, becomes definitive for Schleiermacher’s construal of the Christian faith.

Indeed, his great dogmatic work, *The Christian Faith*, can be seen as a logical and systematic exposition of theology from his fundamental first principle, the primacy of the feeling of absolute dependence. Cooper writes that for Schleiermacher, “There is nothing in Scripture or in true Christianity that does not derive from and cannot be explained by the experience of absolute dependence.”[69] Schleiermacher’s construal of religious intuition as constituting its own sovereign sphere gave rise to the movement later identified as liberal or neo-Protestant theology, coming to fully synthesized expression in the neo-Kantian theology of Albrecht Ritschl. Each sphere is eventually severed from the other, as “reason

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[67] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 44.

[68] Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology*, 47. Emphasis added.

[69] Cooper, *Panentheism—The Other God of the Philosophers*, 83.

and conscience give rise to science and morality; piety gives rise to religion," and never shall the authority of one interfere with the authority of another.[70] And if Schleiermacher was right about the universality of such religious experience, this experience could and would be the object of investigation as in pursuit of a phenomenology of religion, a task later taken up by phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950).

Leo XIII and Neo-Thomism

While the trails blazed by Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher and others generally recast in radical fashion the relationship between theology and philosophy and the methodological assumptions inherited following later scholasticism, the nineteenth century also saw revival of modified forms of various Christian traditions more purposefully and explicitly dependent on older sources. One of these is found in the scholastic revival in Roman Catholicism in the nineteenth century, a movement that essentially amounted to a repristination of the theology of Thomas Aquinas. T. C. Crowley thus identifies contemporary Roman Catholic scholasticism as "predominantly an attempt to return to the vital thought of St. Thomas in a way that is relevant to contemporary man."[71] Although Crowley admits that neoscholasticism also includes revivals to a greater or lesser degree of the thought of figures such as John Duns Scotus and Franciso Suarez, the dominance of Thomas would be established as the nineteenth century progressed. In this way, the

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[70] Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 44-45.

[71] See T.C. Crowley, "Contemporary Scholasticism," in NCE1 12:1165, s.v. "Scholasticism."

neoscholastic revival of the period was narrower in scope than either medieval or second scholasticism.

The purpose of this revival was to reinvigorate Catholic intellectual engagement with the modern world. A key champion of the neo-Thomist revival in the Roman Catholic Church was Vincenzo Gioacchino Raffaele Luigi Pecci (1810-1903), who would reign as Pope Leo XIII from 1878 until his death. This final quarter of the nineteenth century would see significant official action by the Vatican to establish a modified scholasticism as a bulwark against secular modernity. Thus, writes Crowley,

> During the pontificate of Leo XIII the reestablishment of scholasticism had six goals: (1) to edit critically the text of scholastic authors, particularly St. Thomas; (2) to study the historical origins and evolution of scholastic philosophy; (3) to expound the solid doctrine (*philosophia perennis*) of scholastic philosophy for a modern age, discarding useless and false views; (4) to study and refute errors of recent and contemporary philosophers; (5) to study the physical sciences and examine their relevance to philosophy; and (6) to construct a new scholastic synthesis of all science.[72]

This was a far-ranging and ambitious vision, and “since this program would not be accomplished by one man or group, it was hoped that cooperation of all Catholic intellectuals could be counted on.”[73] At the turn of the twentieth century, the comprehensive revival and application of Thomism to the modern world had been established as the official agenda of the Roman Catholic church.

This agenda was pursued by Leo XIII in a variety of ways, but most notably perhaps in his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of 1879, which took up the topic of “the restoration

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[72] Crowley, “Contemporary Scholasticism,” 1167.

[73] Crowley, “Contemporary Scholasticism,” 1167.

of Christian philosophy."[74] Christian philosophy has at least three basic purposes according to Leo. First, "philosophy, if rightly made use of by the wise, in a certain way tends to smooth and fortify the road to true faith, and to prepare the souls of its disciples for the fit reception of revelation." Here Leo has in mind particularly pagan philosophers whose insights could be used to "support the Christian faith." Admitting that such thinkers arrived at many true insights, even into metaphysical and speculative matters, Leo invokes the biblical precedent of the plunder of the Egyptians in the book of Exodus to illustrate the ways in which Christian philosophy might make use of the insights and truths derived from pagan philosophers.[75]

A second purpose of Christian philosophy is to assure "that sacred theology may receive and assume the nature, form, and genius of a true science." Here the traditional understanding of philosophy as the *ancilla*, or hand-maiden, to theology is underscored. Philosophy can provide the tools to systematically and rationally organize and relate the "the many and various parts of the heavenly doctrines, that, each being allotted to its own proper place and derived from its own proper principles, the whole may join together in a complete union."[76]

A final purpose of Christian philosophy is essentially apologetic. This is the task "of religiously defending the truths divinely delivered, and of resisting those who dare oppose them." The attacks launched against the truths of the Christian faith are appropriately defended by weapons of a similar cast: "For, as the enemies of the Catholic

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[74] Leo XIII, encyclical letter *Aeterni Patris* (August 4, 1879).

[75] Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, 4.

[76] Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, 6.

name, when about to attack religion, are in the habit of borrowing their weapons from the arguments of philosophers, so the defenders of sacred science draw many arguments from the store of philosophy which may serve to uphold revealed dogmas."[77]

The significant but secondary role of Christian philosophy depicted in *Aeterni Patris* is a pointed departure from the role of human reasoning apparent in figures like Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher. The encyclical lines out sharp limits to what human philosophy, Christian or otherwise, can aim to accomplish. Invoking divine revelation, Leo writes,

> As it is evident that very many truths of the supernatural order which are far beyond the reach of the keenest intellect must be accepted, human reason, conscious of its own infirmity, dare not affect to itself too great powers, nor deny those truths, nor measure them by its own standard, nor interpret them at will; but receive them, rather, with a full and humble faith, and esteem it the highest honor to be allowed to wait upon heavenly doctrines like a handmaid and attendant, and by God's goodness attain to them in any way whatsoever.[78]

Leo proceeds to recount cases in which these boundaries have not been respected and the errors into which pagan philosophers have inevitably fallen. The historic precedent of Christian philosophers who have combatted such errors and built up the intellectual foundations of the faith are lauded as exemplary for those called to a similar task in the contemporary age.

Thus, writes Leo, "Among the Scholastic Doctors, the chief and master of all towers Thomas Aquinas…. The doctrines of those illustrious men, like the scattered members of a body, Thomas collected together and cemented, distributed in wonderful order, and so increased with important additions that he is rightly and deservedly esteemed

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[77] Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, 7.

[78] Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, 8.

the special bulwark and glory of the Catholic faith." Such was Thomas' accomplishment that the armory of philosophical insights and theological truths he collected served such "that, single-handed, he victoriously combated the errors of former times, and supplied invincible arms to put those to rout which might in after-times spring up."[79] In this and many other statements throughout the encyclical Thomas Aquinas is lifted up as the Catholic philosopher *par excellence* and whose work must be restored and rediscovered in order for the church to be appropriately defended and maintained. Thus "the Thomistic revival," observed Jaroslav Pelikan, "enthroned Thomas Aquinas as the one thinker who is indispensable to any Roman Catholic thought in any field of human knowledge."[80]

Part of this program to rehabilitate and deploy Thomistic philosophy came to expression in Leo XIII's inauguration of what would become more formally known as Catholic Social Teaching (CST) with the publication of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. This encyclical dealt with the "new things" of modernity, the political, social, and economic "revolutions" of previous centuries. Of particular concern for Leo in *Rerum Novarum* was the practical impact of the social philosophies of Marxism and utilitarianism, which tended to come to expression in materialism and social atomism, on the poor. "At the time being, the condition of the working classes is the pressing question of the hour, and nothing can be of higher interest to all classes of the State than that it should be rightly and reasonably settled," wrote Leo.[81] At work in Leo's exposition of the social question is

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[79] Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, 18.

[80] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism: Its History, Its Beliefs, Its Future* (New York: Abingdon Press,1959), 150.

[81] Leo XIII, encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* (May 1, 1891), 60.

an application of natural-law reasoning to the questions of private property, material development, charity, and civil society. This line of social thought, grounded in the main on a neo-Thomistic philosophical foundation, would over time come more formally to be characterized by the basic principles of Catholic Social Thought, including solidarity, subsidiarity, the universal destination of goods, and the common good.[82]

Kuyper and Neo-Calvinism

In 1891, the same year that Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the First Christian Social Congress was held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and the leading neo-Calvinist thinker Abraham Kuyper gave a plenary address on the social question, or "the problem of poverty."[83] Neo-Calvinism arose as a comprehensive theological, cultural, social, and political program in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century. Like neo-Thomism, the movement was an attempt to recapture and reapply classical insights to the modern situation. For Dutch Reformed thinkers, the natural source to turn to in the church's history was the period of the Reformation rather than to the scholasticism of the medieval era. Abraham Kuyper, along with his mentor Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) and his younger colleague Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), developed a platform for Reformed political engagement (the Anti-Revolutionary Party, or ARP), an institution for higher learning (the Free University), a new church (the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, or GKN), as well as numerous publications, including newspapers, magazines,

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[82] See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (London: Continuum, 2004), ch. 4, "Principles of the Church's Social Doctrine."

[83] Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, ed. James W. Skillen (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2011).

and books, both academic and popular.[84]

Neo-Calvinism is contextually significant for developments in Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because it represents a contemporaneous theological movement that engaged critically with modern philosophies and other Christian traditions, particularly Roman Catholicism and neo-Thomism. The comprehensiveness of the neo-Calvinist program lines up in surprising ways with the theological and social vision that Dietrich Bonhoeffer would later articulate.[85]

Neo-Calvinism can thus be seen as a distinct but related movement that overlaps and diverges in significant ways with contemporaneous traditions and figures. In the case of van Prinsterer, for instance, there is noteworthy engagement with the social thought of the Lutheran jurist Friedrich Stahl (1802-1861).[86] In comparison with Roman Catholicism, neo-Calvinism often developed concepts that functioned similarly but had different groundings, emphases, and terminology. Rather than discussing subsidiarity, for example, Kuyper and others would invoke the idea of "sphere sovereignty."[87] These distinctive

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[84] The definitive contemporary biography of Kuyper is James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

[85] These correspondences deserve comprehensive study that cannot be undertaken here. A helpful initial foray has been made by Brant Himes, "Distinct Discipleship: Abraham Kuyper, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Christian Engagement in Public Life," in *The Kuyper Center Review: Volume Four: Calvinism and Democracy*, ed. John Bowlin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 147-170.

[86] See A. Klink, "Groen van Prinsterer en Stahl," in *Groen van Prinsterer in Europese Context*, ed. J. de Bruijn and G. Harinck (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), 55-60. See also Groen van Prinsterer, *Ter Nagedachtenis van Stahl* (Amsterdam: H. Höveker, 1862).

[87] See James W. Skillen and Rockne M. McCarthy, "Subsidiarity, Natural Law, and the Common Good," and "Sphere Sovereignty, Creation Order, and Public Justice," in *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society*, ed. James W. Skillen and Rockne S. McCarthy (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 377-395, 396-417. For the contrast between "subsidiarity" as "scholastic" and "sphere sovereignty" as "reformational," see Johan van der Vyver, "The Jurisprudential

treatments of similar, although often not identical, concepts arose out of the confessional controversies following the Reformation. For Kuyper it was particularly important to show how neo-Calvinism substantially differed from Roman Catholicism and other Christian traditions. For ideas like natural law and subsidiarity, for instance, where there was large-scale agreement across confessions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, by the nineteenth centuries confessional loyalties demanded distinctive vocabularies.[88]

This tendency in Kuyper would later become a kind of litmus test for his followers. Thus, even while Kuyper was engaged in articulating the doctrine of common grace in what he considered to be the most comprehensive exploration of the topic in the history of Reformed thought, Kuyper explicitly connected a traditional conception of natural law with the moral aspect of common grace. In this way, writes Kuyper, in Romans 2, the apostle Paul "elevates the Gentiles not for what they are in themselves, but with an appeal to the common grace of God that is active in them. And this common grace manifests itself in the first place in this, that *they still have something written on their hearts*."[89]

Legacy of Abraham Kuyper and Leo XIII," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 211-249.

[88] On natural law and the Reformed tradition, see Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). On the early modern roots of subsidiarity among the Reformed, see Jordan J. Ballor, "State, Church, and the Reformational Roots of Subsidiarity," in *The Myth of the Reformation*, ed. Peter Opitz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 148-159. On the relationship between natural law and subsidiarity, see Jordan J. Ballor, "A Society of Mutual Aid: Natural Law and Subsidiarity in Early Modern Reformed Perspective," in *Law and Religion: The Legal Teachings of the Catholic and Protestant Reformations*, ed. Wim Decock, Jordan J. Ballor, Michael Germann, and Laurent Waelkens (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 9-21. See also Lael Daniel Weinberger, "The Relationship between Subsidiarity and Sphere Sovereignty," in *Global Perspectives on Subsidiarity*, ed. Michelle Evans and Augusto Zimmermann (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 49-62.

[89] Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 3 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1902-1904): 2:17; ET: *Common Grace*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: CLP Academic, 2013-).

For Kuyper, natural law is an expression of common grace. After Kuyper, however, followers like Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) would increasingly come to question the veracity of natural-law thinking.[90] These later critics of natural law became definitive of later connections between neo-Calvinism and the rejection of natural law, a position at odds with the basic dispositions of Kuyper and Bavinck, and the subject of ongoing debate.[91]

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[90] Compare the positions of Dooyeweerd in the 1925 essay, "Calvinism and Natural Law," trans. A. Wolters, in *Essays in Legal, Social, and Political Philosophy* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1996), 3-38; idem, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, trans. John Kraay, ed. Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra (Toronto: Wedge, 1979); and idem, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, trans. David H. Freeman, William S. Young, and H. de Jongste, 4 vols. (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1984).

[91] See Richard Mouw, "Law, Covenant, and Moral Commonalities: Some Neo-Calvinist Explorations," in *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship: Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 69-86; and Vincent E. Bacote, "Natural Law: Friend of Common Grace?" in *Natural Law and Evangelical Political Thought*, ed. Jesse Covington, Bryan McGraw, and Micah Watson (Lanham: Lexington, 2013), 153-164; on neo-Calvinism and natural law, see David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 525-533.

CHAPTER 3

NATURAL LAW & NEO-ORTHODOXY

The shared legacy of Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher is the critical philosophy of the nineteenth century, which arose in response to Hume's empiricist skepticism and attempted, in various forms, to construct a way from the phenomenal to the noumenal, or rather, a new foundation for claims to religious knowledge. Neo-Thomism and neo-Calvinism, in distinct ways, attempted to rehabilitate classical Christian conceptions of the relationship between reason and revelation within the context of the challenges of modernity.

As he surveyed the intellectual landscape after the Great War, the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) saw a field of battered and broken idols, human attempts to seize and domesticate the transcendent.[1] If thinkers like Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher were attempting to find God through nature and natural reason, Barth was determined to proclaim a transcendent God coming to his creation in history.[2] The emphasis on the event-character of revelation, that is, revelation as event, is fundamental to Barth's theology. The foundational importance of revelation's event-character illustrated in its relation to Barth's rejection of a so-called "point of contact" in the human person. In addition to rejecting the theology of Schleiermacher, the denial of a point of contact is an aspect of Barth's attack on the Roman Catholic doctrine of the *analogia entis*, and

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[1] See, for instance, Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

[2] See particularly Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933).

therefore is itself a constitutive factor in his rejection of natural theology.[3]

The theological movement inaugurated by Barth and his attack on the received wisdom of theological movements in the nineteenth century is often called *neo-orthodoxy*, an attempt to recapture the key theological insights at the heart of the Christian faith found in the Scriptures. This required a return to the sources, particularly those of the Reformation, which embodied the church's best understanding of the Word of God.

Existentialism and Actualism

An important background connecting the transcendental and idealistic approaches of the nineteenth century and the theology of Karl Barth is the existentialist movement, which is also a formative background for Bonhoeffer's theology. James Brown's work explores the place of existentialist thought in recent theology and culminates with an explication of Karl Barth as a representative of specifically Christian theological existentialism (along with Søren Kierkegaard [1813-1855]). One of the difficulties Brown faces, however, is that in the preface to the first part of the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth explicitly claims to have parted ways from any existentialist foundation. Barth writes, "In this second draft I have excluded to the very best of my ability anything that might appear to find for theology a foundation, support, or justification in philosophical existentialism."[4]

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[3] On the analogy of being in the thought of a prominent Roman Catholic contemporary and interlocutor, see Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014). See also Thomas Joseph White, ed., *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); and Keith L. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the* Analogia Entis (New York: T&T Clark, 2011).

[4] CD I/1, xiii.

Brown explains that by reference to philosophical existentialism in this passage, Barth primarily means that strain represented by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who is "one of the main points of contact of the new and the old Existentialism with theology proper. His is the influence which Karl Barth seeks to eliminate from his own theology in successive editions of the *Dogmatik* (particularly the famous first volume)."[5]

But it is manifestly apparent that Barth's difficulties with existentialism go beyond the figure of Heidegger. Indeed, in a later lecture, Barth says that an existentialist understanding of revelation is improper for the theology of the Church. He writes, "If we were existentialist philosophers like Heidegger, or even Kierkegaard, we could speak of a revelation of the 'limits' of all existence. But such a revelation could not be the foundation of the Church. The Church is not concerned with the revelation of some existence or other, or of its, limits, but with the revelation of God."[6] And what an explicit linkage of this kind does not prove, a closer examination of the existentialist program will further show its incompatibility with Barth's theology.

Brown summarizes the more particular "existentialist modification of the Subject" as the teaching that the Subject "*exists for* itself and by its own realization of itself."[7] Indeed, "the Subject chooses itself in freedom. *Existenz* enters here upon a new potential where the vales of ethics and religion and creative art and intellect are in place. Existentialism, in the current modern sense, operates in terms of this second sense of the

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[5] James Brown, *Subject and Object in Modern Theology: The Croall Lectures given in the University of Edinburgh 1953* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 86.

[6] Karl Barth, *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings, 1946-52*, ed. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: SCM Press, 1954), 226.

[7] Brown, *Subject and Object*, 176.

word existence, and presents us with varying views of man's world as dependent upon his self-realization in face of it."[8] We can see at once why Barth would reject such a teaching. It ascribes to humans the sort of independence or aseity that can only be attributed to God. One passage among the many to be found in Barth which denies such a conception of the human person is as follows: "The method prescribed for us by Holy Scripture not only assumes that the entelechy of man's I-ness is not divine in nature, but on the contrary, is in contradiction to the divine nature. It also assumes that God is in no way bound to man, that his revelation is thus an act of His freedom, contradicting man's contradiction."[9]

So here is the point of disagreement between Barth and existentialism: we might say that the latter is anthropocentric, while the former is theocentric. Brown is right to point out that there are affinities in certain aspects of Barth's thought with philosophical existentialism, not the least of which is the conception of revelation as the event of encounter. But by no means do these affinities warrant the classification of Barth as a Christian existentialist. If the self-creating Subject is at the heart of existentialism, we might rather say that Karl Barth is an anti-existentialist, or at least something like a divine existentialist. In Barth, the *Existenz* of the human person is so radically bracketed under God's Subjectivity that such an assertion may not be too bold. The anthropological assumptions of existentialism are radically untenable for Barth.

In this way existentialism comes under the same condemnation as all other human-centered philosophies: they are idolatrous attempts to grasp and manipulate the divine. Rather than taking a point of departure in any creaturely capacity, whether practical

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[8] Brown, *Subject and Object*, 176.

[9] CD I/2, 7.

reason, speculative idealism, religious feeling, or perduring orders of existence or sovereign spheres, Barth characterizes divine revelation in a radically contingent way. It is not too much to say that the single key point of Barth's doctrine of revelation is his construal of revelation as event. The contention permeates the *Church Dogmatics*, especially in his discussion of the threefold form of the Word of God. Jesus Christ, as the primal form of revelation, underlies the other two forms of proclamation and Scripture. As such, the foundational event of the incarnation is the basis for the derivative forms of God's Word. It is with this relationship between the forms of the Word of God in mind that Barth writes, "Precisely in view of revelation, or on the basis of it, one may thus say of proclamation and the Bible that they are God's Word, that they continually become God's Word."[10] That is, Scripture or proclamation becomes the Word of God only to the extent that it acts as a means for encounter of the person Jesus Christ. And it can only do this provisionally and in time, so that there is no permanent or logically necessary relationship between proclamation or the Bible and revelation.

Nicholas Wolterstorff rightly speaks of this repeated becoming of proclamation and Scripture as a "relentless" or "emphatic eventism" in Karl Barth.[11] By this, Wolterstorff is getting at Barth's consistent application of his scheme throughout his dogmatics, as well as the formative effects this has for his doctrine of Scripture and proclamation. Barth wants to avoid at all costs the impression that revelation is something permanently present or perceptible. He writes, "The Word of God is the speech, the act, the mystery of God. It is

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[10] CD I/1, 118.

[11] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 71.

not a demonstrable substance immanent in the Church and present within it apart from the event of its being spoken and heard."[12]

God cannot be bound to anything, not even the Bible, in the sense that it can have a necessary or legitimate claim on him. Wolterstorff writes that one of the primary reasons for Barth's emphasis on the coming-to-be revelation of Scripture is that "Barth regarded the claim that God speaks by way of authoring Scripture as compromising the freedom of God. God and God alone speaks for God."[13] The Bible is certainly one of the ordained means that God chooses through which to communicate himself. But it is not in itself a repository or source of divine revelation.[14] For Barth, the Word of God, revelation itself, "is not bound to the sign-giving" of the sacraments, proclamation, and Scripture. But for the purposes of the Church, "we are bound to the sign-giving. We cannot know anything or say anything about any other Word or Spirit except that which comes to us through the divine sign-giving."[15] Human attempts to read divine signs in unauthorized ways amounts to idolatry, and this is the basic problem that Barth identifies with the classical theistic approaches of the past and more recent rationalistic philosophies. All of them take nature as a point of departure and a relevant datum for revelation.

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[12] CD I/1, 261.

[13] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 73-74.

[14] Cf. Barth's rejection of the Lutheran view that "the Word of God preached and written has its own divine power no matter what may be its effect on those who hear or read," in CD I.1, 110–11.

[15] CD I/2, 236.

Nature and Grace

The miraculous nature of the revelation event in Barth's theology is built around the assumption that this miracle consists in God's making of the impossible to be possible. The impossibility is the reception of the knowledge of God by fallen humanity, and the possibility is the divine decision for God to make himself knowable. These aspects of Barth's doctrine of revelation will be further explored in dialogue with a position that Barth most vigorously opposes. This opposing position assumes a possibility or point of contact existing in the human person prior to the revelation event. This problematic conception of human possibility can come to expression in a Schleiermachian point of contact or a Thomistic doctrine of the *analogia entis*, but there is little functional difference between them for Barth.

Emil Brunner (1889-1966), as a contemporary of Barth and even as an early co-belligerent for a truly Christocentric theology, is an excellent representative of a theologian whom Barth finds to be critically opposed to his own program. In the Barth-Brunner debate of 1934, a key point of contention is over the doctrine of the *imago dei*. Barth holds (at least in the early 1930s) that the image of God is destroyed by the Fall. By contrast, Emil Brunner states, in part appealing to the authority of Calvin, "The imago is the seat of responsibility. Similarly it is the seat of religion, of the knowledge of God and of God's worthiness to be worshipped. Apropos of these thoughts Calvin touches upon the distinction between the formal and the material factors: the imago is just sufficient to enable man to know God but not to know his How, to urge him towards religion without, however, making a true religion possible for him."[16]

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[16] Emil Brunner, "Nature and Grace," in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and*

It indeed seems that the condition or capacity for knowledge of God is, if not identical with the image of God, at least a constitutive element of it for Brunner: "The imago, which man retains, is the principle of the *theologia naturalis* in the subjective sense, i.e. of that knowledge of God derived from nature, of which man is capable apart from revelation in the Scriptures or in Jesus Christ."[17] So on one level, Barth and Brunner agree that the image of God is the essential factor for the reception of revelation by the human person. They disagree on whether this image, and thus any capacity or point of contact, is present in any sense in the fallen human. Despite some apparent equivocation, Brunner is largely insistent that the capacity or point of contact is a purely passive one. He writes, "This 'receptivity' must not be understood in the material sense. This receptivity says nothing as to his acceptance or rejection of the Word of God. It is the purely formal possibility of his being addressed."[18]

Barth certainly abhors any active principle in the human person related to revelation, and this is perhaps the primary way in which he understands the doctrine of the point of contact. He writes of Brunner's anthropological account, "there is 'in man a point of contact for the divine message which is not disturbed by sin.' There is a 'questing after God' which is natural to man."[19] In any case, this distinction ends up being of little

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Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth, trans. Peter Fraenkel (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002; repr. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), 42.

[17] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 43.

[18] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 31. John Baillie confirms this understanding of Brunner when he writes that Brunner's doctrine of human capacity is "the purely passive capacity to be reached by the revelation and to hear the Word when it is uttered." See Baillie, "Introduction," in *Natural Theology*, 9.

[19] CD I/1, 27.

consequence for Barth's response.[20] This is because Barth refuses to acknowledge any anthropological principle, active or passive, material or formal, in the fallen human.

In the end, the crux of Brunner's contention is that the fallen human remains responsible as a rational and addressable being, and it is precisely this formal image, the human rational soul perhaps, that is the passive point of contact or address for divine revelation. Brunner argues that we must "make the fact that God is a subject the governing thought in our theology – as Barth quite rightly does. But this means that the whole Barthian theology rests *de facto* upon the doctrine of the formal *imago Dei*, which he so much dislikes, i.e. upon the doctrine that man as we know him, sinful man, is the only legitimate analogy to God, because he is always a rational being, a subject, a person."[21] We will come back to this point later, when we examine the relevance of Barth's doctrine of revelation for his depiction of fallen humanity.

Barth's basic problem with a program like Brunner's is that its starting place is wrong, and therefore any possible insights it may gain are invalidated: "There is a way from Christology to anthropology, but there is no way from anthropology to Christology."[22] Rather than approaching the question of revelation from an anthropological and epistemological direction, the proper dogmatic course is to approach it from the perspective of the divine. In this way, Barth states, "Our starting point is not in any sense epistemological. However man's capacity for knowledge may be described,

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[20] See the "Translator's Note" which relates that the German word *Offenbarungsmächtigkeit* "has been rendered by 'capacity for revelation' as being capable, like the German, both of an active and of a passive interpretation," in *Natural Theology*, 13.

[21] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 55.

[22] CD I/1, 131.

whether more narrowly or more broadly, yet the conclusion that God is known only through God (we speak of the God who has revealed Himself in His Word) does not have either its basis or origin in any understanding of the human capacity for knowledge."[23]

This calls into question the attempt by Brown to interpret Barth's doctrine in a way that seems to bridge Brunner and Barth's contention. Brown writes of Barth, "There is nothing here that is man's own prior possession, unless possibility itself is to be reckoned a possession. Is *posse* an *esse*, and is it *man's possession*? Man is addressable. A 'point of contact', an *Anknüpfungspunkt* between revelation and response, will submit to the general definition of a point as 'that which has position but no magnitude'."[24] In the doctrine of revelation Barth simply does not acknowledge *any* possibility from the side of the human. It is precisely Brunner's contention (or at least one of them) that the purely passive possibility is "to be reckoned as a possession."

The question of the *imago dei* is on Barth's side one that must be emphatically denied in the life of the fallen human. Barth writes, "It is not, of course, that man is claimed for God on the basis of a relic of his relationship and commitment to God by creation, as though the fall had not been so radical in its consequences."[25] In his angry reply to Brunner, Barth remarks, "'that which is good in the sight of God' is also lost. One would have thought that this included the possibility of receiving the revelation of God."[26] A human element that exists even as a passive possibility opens up the door to something like

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[23] CD II/1, 44.

[24] Brown, *Subject and Object*, 165.

[25] CD I/1, 155.

[26] Karl Barth, "No!," in *Natural Theology*, 80.

a Pelagian heresy, where on the basis of their own capacity or effort human beings can be saved. It is also clear that such a capacity would in some sense be a permanent or general feature of humankind.

George Hunsinger writes that Barth's critique at this point is "developed especially in terms of actualism, but the constructive alternative especially in terms of objectivism. That is, the critique argues primarily that by affirming our natural capacities this theology ends by denying the miracle of grace, whereas the constructive alternative argues that our capacity for grace is mediated in an exclusively christological fashion."[27] In this way Barth's critique of a point of contact is largely derivative of his conception of revelation as event. Brunner himself contends this, when he writes, "Barth refuses to recognize that where revelation and faith are concerned, there can be anything permanent, fixed, and, as it were, natural. He acknowledges only the act, the event of revelation, but never anything revealed, or, as he says, the fact of revelation. The whole strength of Barthian theology lies in the assertion of the actual."[28]

The Scottish theologian John Baillie (1886-1960), who wrote an introduction to the English translation of the Barth-Brunner debate, evaluated the disagreement thusly: "Dr. Barth's position seems to me untrue to the facts but clearly argued; Dr. Brunner's position seems nearer the truth but, because it is not sufficiently far advanced beyond the other, to be involved in confusion and unreal compromise."[29]

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[27] George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 97.

[28] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 48-49.

[29] John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 30.

Bonhoeffer's Way Forward

Within the context of the Barth-Brunner debate, Bonhoeffer's theological program, both leading up to the outbreak of the disagreement in 1934 and following, represents a unique way beyond the parameters of the conflict. Bonhoeffer's goal, particularly as articulated in his mature yet incomplete *Ethics* and in continuity with his early work, is to properly value the natural as penultimate, originating from, subsisting in, and oriented toward Jesus Christ. Thus the natural is neither to be derogated as worthless, empty, and vain nor to be idolized as ultimate. Bonhoeffer's way forward beyond the Barth-Brunner debate can be seen explicitly in his treatment of relevant doctrines, particularly the image of God and the orders of creation and preservation. After explicating Bonhoeffer's basic understanding of these topics, we will explore his basic understandings of two other doctrines, that of vocation and vicarious representative action, before proceeding to the main section of the study, in which we will come to understand and apply Bonhoeffer's divine mandates as manifestations of a natural-law ethic.

The Image of God and Orders of Preservation

Bonhoeffer's concept of the orders of preservation, which are oriented and subsidiary to Christ, provides the foundation for Bonhoeffer's important and oft-overlooked corrective to the positions laid out in the Barth-Brunner debate.[30] In relation to the specifics of the Barth-Brunner debate, Bonhoeffer's theological exposition of Genesis 1-3, delivered as

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[30] This section rehearses and updates some of the main points of argumentation that previously appeared in Jordan J. Ballor, "Christ in Creation: Bonhoeffer's Orders of Preservation and the Question of Natural Theology." *Journal of Religion* 86, no. 1 (January 2006): 1-22.

lectures in the winter semester of 1932-33 at the University of Berlin, is of great importance, both because of its temporal proximity and because it represents an early statement of doctrines that Bonhoeffer would later develop in materially continuous ways. Chronologically this set of lectures is antecedent to the public outbreak of the Barth-Brunner debate in 1934 and thus affords an important look at Bonhoeffer's creation theology before a critique of Barth in the area of natural theology would have had much greater political and public consequences. This set of lectures belongs to the second phase of the relationship between Barth and Bonhoeffer outlined by Eberhard Bethge, characterized by the primacy of the practical over the theoretical and comprised of "theological differences, accompanied by a very close alliance in church politics."[31]

In one sense, it is easy to understand why Bonhoeffer's accord with Barth is so greatly emphasized by the scholarship, since the method of the enterprise itself is so "Barthian." As Martin Rüter and Ilse Tödt, editors of the German edition of *Creation and Fall* observe, "Bonhoeffer's announcement of his lecture course as a 'theological exposition' showed that he wished to stay true to Karl Barth's method," which had been put forth in Barth's commentary on Romans, first published in 1918.[32] Bonhoeffer explicitly describes his method as he states, "Theological exposition takes the Bible as the book of the church and interprets it as such. That is its presupposition and this presupposition constitutes its method; its method is a continual returning from the text …

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[31] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, trans. Eric Mosbacher et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 178.

[32] DBWE 3:151.

to this presupposition."[33] This choice of method corresponds with Bonhoeffer's increasing concern for the pastoral and ecclesial applicability of his academic work. As such, Bonhoeffer had "fallen between two stools. The exegetes regarded the work as systematics, and the systematicians viewed it as exegesis. One group was indignant and the other took no notice."[34]

Most important for the question of natural theology in *Creation and Fall* is Bonhoeffer's use of "orders of preservation" to describe the situation of the world after the Fall.[35] The radical discontinuity that Bonhoeffer finds between the prelapse state of humankind in the *imago dei* and the postlapse state as *sicut deus* ("like God") in the Genesis lectures could lead us to conclude that the image of God is absolutely destroyed or no longer existent in human beings after the Fall. Given the interpretive guides commonly associated with Bonhoeffer's work, it would be easy to read Bonhoeffer's use of *imago dei* in a way consistent with Barth's usage. It is much more plausible, however, that Bonhoeffer is using the term in a way consistent with the Lutheran tradition (corresponding only or primarily to the elements of what the Reformed would call the "narrow" image), which would additionally relieve possible tensions regarding the tenability and basis of his doctrine of preservation orders.[36] Bonhoeffer's sense of utter loss in the Fall is tempered

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[33] DBWE 3:22.

[34] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 217.

[35] Pangritz does not explicitly deal with *Creation and Fall*, but his exposition of Bonhoeffer's use of preservation orders in 1932 illuminate this discussion. See Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 39-47.

[36] For a typical Lutheran discussion of the *imago dei*, which contends "that man through the Fall has entirely lost the image of God in its proper sense," see John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1934), 205-10.

by his doctrine of God's preservation even in the face of creaturely sin.

Andreas Pangritz provides us with an understanding of the context for Bonhoeffer's formulation of orders of preservation that allows a careful and measured evaluation. In a lecture "On the Theological Foundation of the Work of the World Alliance," read to the International Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia on July 26, 1932, Bonhoeffer calls the World Alliance's push for international peace "a commandment of the wrathful God, an order of the preservation of the world toward Christ."[37] Bonhoeffer points to the possibility that a secularized goal of international peace is no valid goal, as "International peace is therefore also not an absolutely ideal condition but rather an order that is aimed at something else and that is not valuable in and of itself."[38] Thus the character of "international peace" after the Fall is such that it too is broken and marred by sin and evil and disconnected from its origin and end in Christ.

Bonhoeffer echoes the ongoing cry of the prophet Jeremiah, who says, "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14, 8:11 NIV). Bonhoeffer writes, "A community of peace can exist only when it does not rest on *a lie* or on *injustice*. Wherever a community of peace endangers or suffocates truth and justice, the community of peace must be broken and the battle must be declared."[39] Pangritz rightly observes that Bonhoeffer's "discussion of the 'orders of preservation' is meant to fill in a gap in Barth's understanding precisely where the theological foundation ought to be for a binding proclamation of peace and social

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[37] DBWE 11:365.

[38] DBWE 11:365.

[39] DBWE 11:365.

justice as concrete commandments."[40] Thus Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the "orders of preservation" is raised exactly at the point where Bonhoeffer puts forth the best answer for his own question, "How can the gospel and the commandment be proclaimed by the church in authority, but this means in its most complete concretion?"[41]

So the appearance of the orders of preservation in *Creation and Fall* are not the first time we come across such language in Bonhoeffer. In *Creation and Fall* Bonhoeffer juxtaposes the orders of creation and the orders of preservation. There are two primary uses of the term "preservation" for Bonhoeffer in this work. The first refers simply to God's continuing activity that upholds creation in existence after its initial beginning. This kind of preservation was and would have continued to have been necessary even apart from the Fall into sin. Thus Bonhoeffer acknowledges the inherent relationship between creation and preservation, as he writes, "God looks at God's work and is pleased with it, because it is good. This means that God loves God's work and therefore wills to uphold and preserve it. Creation and preservation are two sides of the same activity of God."[42]

A second, more specific, use of preservation is the one that is related to the orders of preservation. For Bonhoeffer, the orders that were set in creation are not operative in the same way after the Fall. They are so markedly affected by sin that they can no longer be recognized as "orders of creation." Instead, the only identifiable orders are those of preservation: provisional orders set up to keep the creation in existence after its fall into sin and to restrain sin. God's activity changes after the Fall, as "the Creator is now the

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[40] Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 44.

[41] DBWE 11:360.

[42] DBWE 3:42.

preserver; the created world is now the fallen but preserved world."[43] Of course, God was preserving the world in the first more general sense before the Fall, but it is in the second more specialized sense of preservation that God preserves the world after the Fall. The preservation orders are the means by which God keeps the creation from sinking back into nonexistence in view of the Fall. Bonhoeffer writes, "God's way of acting to preserve the world is to affirm the sinful world and to show it its limits by means of order."[44] The orders in effect after the Fall are not creation orders, but preservation orders, for "none of these orders, however, has in itself any eternal character, for all are there only to uphold or preserve life."[45]

Bonhoeffer's rejection of the creation order language is understandable from a rhetorical perspective, since a dominant contemporary usage of such doctrines was as a prop for Nazism. As de Gruchy observes, Bonhoeffer followed Barth in attempting to "oppose the misuse by some German theologians of the Lutheran doctrine of the 'orders of creation' to support the Nazi ideology of 'blood and soil.'"[46] But it is exactly at this point where Bonhoeffer differs from Barth. Later, in defending his choice of the term "mandates," Bonhoeffer says that "Understood properly, one could also use the term 'order' [Ordnung] here, if only the concept did not contain the inherent danger of focusing more strongly on the static element of order rather than on the divine authorizing,

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[43] DBWE 3:139.

[44] DBWE 3:139.

[45] DBWE 3:139.

[46] DBWE 3:11-12.

legitimizing, and sanctioning, which are its sole foundation."[47] Bonhoeffer goes on to note briefly the historic options of discussing *estates* and *offices*, and concludes by judging that "Lacking a better word we thus stay, for the time being, with the concept of mandate. Nevertheless, our goal, through clarifying the issue itself, is to contribute to renewing and reclaiming the old concepts of order, estate, and office."[48] By contrast, Barth finds no use for any language of objective "order," whether of creation or preservation. To better understand the context of Barth's rejection of orders, we must first examine the orders of creation and preservation in Brunner.

Whereas Bonhoeffer draws the line of distinction between orders of creation and orders of preservation at the Fall, Brunner finds both in effect after the Fall. There are, nevertheless, major points of agreement between Bonhoeffer and Brunner. Both find that God's primary action after the Fall is that of preservation. Brunner writes, "The manner in which God is present to his fallen creature is in his preserving grace. Preserving grace does not abolish sin but abolishes the worst consequences of sin."[49] The distinction that is unique to Brunner as compared to Bonhoeffer, however, is determining certain orders to be either of creation or preservation after the Fall. For example, Brunner finds that marriage is a creation ordinance. This is so because it existed before sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, so that preservation orders are those structures and institutions that are brought into existence solely because of sin. Thus, "Monogamous marriage, for example, is of higher dignity than the State because, as an institution, as an ordinance, it is—apart

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[47] DBWE 6:389.

[48] DBWE 6:390.

[49] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 28.

from special concrete cases—unrelated to sin. … Therefore it has from of old been called an 'ordinance of creation.'"[50]

The order of preservation Brunner uses as an example in opposition to marriage is the state, that is, governmental authority and institution as described, for example, in Romans 13. He writes, "The grace of preservation for the most part consists in that God does not entirely withdraw his grace of creation from the creature in spite of the latter's sin. In part, however, in that, agreeably to the state of sin, he provides new means for checking the worst consequences of sin, e.g. the State."[51] In this way, the state is a novel invention of God's that is designed with the existence of sin in view to curb its effects.

The acknowledgment of the differences between orders of creation and preservation is critical for Brunner. He writes, "The distinction between this 'ordinance of creation' from a mere 'ordinance of preservation' relative to sin, such as the State, is made for sound theological reasons. It is necessary for a Christian theologia naturalis, i.e. for Christian theological thinking which tries to account for the phenomena of natural life."[52] In this statement we see the relative importance and higher value given to the perceived orders of creation versus the orders of preservation.

This distinction is problematic for Bonhoeffer precisely because in his view all of creation has been affected by sin. Indeed, the noetic effects of sin seem to negate our ability to properly judge between that which is strictly of preservation and that which is of creation. For Bonhoeffer, those who argue on the basis of orders of creation do not realize

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[50] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 29.

[51] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 28.

[52] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 29-30.

"that the world has fallen and that sin now rules and that the creation and sin are so intertwined that no human eye can see them as separate, that every human order is the order of the fallen world and not of creation."[53] By rejecting pristine "orders of creation" Bonhoeffer seeks to do justice to the full implications of the Fall.

So while Brunner does not adequately deal with the effects of the Fall, from Bonhoeffer's perspective, Barth does not leave any adequate grounding for ethics that engages the world outside the church. Just as Barth rejects the orders of creation, so too he denies the existence of preservation orders as an expression of grace. Thus Barth writes, "We must go on to ask how far his 'preserving grace' is grace at all. We are ever and again allowed to exist under various conditions which at least moderate the worst abuses. Does that deserve to be called 'grace'? Taken by itself it might just as well be our condemnation to a kind of antechamber of hell!"[54] The original good creation is totally lost in the Fall. Barth writes, "That which is good in the sight of God is also lost. One would have thought that this included the possibility of receiving the revelation of God."[55] And it is at this point that Bonhoeffer departs from Barth.

Bonhoeffer's doctrine of God's preservation allows him to affirm the radical nature of the Fall while maintaining some semblance of created value and goodness, however badly marred. Bonhoeffer writes, "God's look sees the world as good, as created—even where it is a fallen world. And because of God's look, with which God embraces God's

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[53] DBWE 11:363.

[54] Barth, "No!," 84.

[55] Barth, "No!," 80.

work and does not let it go, we live."[56] The Fall of humans manifested in their existence *sicut deus* is tempered by the power of God, for it is God who has the power both to create and to preserve. Bonhoeffer writes, "God alone can address humankind in a different way; that is, God alone can address humankind with regard to its creatureliness that can never be abrogated."[57] Indeed, the creator is the preserver, and the preserver is the redeemer, as Bonhoeffer states of God's preservation, "and God does that in Jesus Christ, in the cross, in the church. Only as the truth that is spoken by God, and that we believe in for God's sake despite all our knowledge of reality, does God speak of the creatureliness of humankind."[58]

Bonhoeffer's main problem with natural theology is in the attempt to set up an independent system, which is simply the action of a *sicut deus* human being writ large into a theological system. Bonhoeffer's disdain for an entirely self-sufficient system of natural theology stems from his view of the biblical witness, as for Bonhoeffer, "what the Bible knows is just this, that in the created world nothing runs 'on its own.'"[59] This is at the heart of Bonhoeffer's critique of the doctrine of creation orders, which separates out orders apart from God's continued preservation. In this way, while Bonhoeffer observes orders, he contends that "none of these orders, however, has in itself any eternal character, for all are there only to uphold or preserve life."[60] To put it another way, creatures or creaturely orders do not possess aseity.

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[56] DBWE 3:42.

[57] DBWE 3:116.

[58] DBWE 3:116.

[59] DBWE 3:58.

[60] DBWE 3:139.

And these orders find their end in Christ, as "all orders of our fallen world are God's orders of preservation that uphold and preserve us for Christ."[61] In a report on the Berlin Youth Conference of April 1932, Bonhoeffer describes the difference of orders of creation and preservation primarily in terms of the independent goodness of the former and the contingent value of the latter in relation to Christ. Bonhoeffer's view is helpfully summarized thusly: "Every order under the preservation of God would then be aligned with Christ and only preserved on his behalf. An order is seen as an order of preservation of God only as long as it is open to the proclamation of the gospel."[62]

The clear centrality of the revelation in Christ becomes even more apparent in Bonhoeffer's discussions of Christ in relation to the revelation in creation and the sacrament. After the Fall, "even revelation must veil itself," and "the whole created world is now covered in a veil."[63] For Bonhoeffer "the fallen creation it is now dumb, in servitude, not free, a creature in subjection, a guilty creature that has lost its freedom, a creature awaiting a new freedom with eager longing. Thus nature is between servitude and liberation, between servitude and redemption."[64] With the Fall "the continuity between Word and creature has been lost. That is why the natural world is no longer a transparent world. That is why the whole creation is no longer sacrament."[65] Since Christ is the unveiled revelation of God, and he is present in the sacraments, Bonhoeffer can say that the

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[61] DBWE 3:140.

[62] DBWE 11:353.

[63] DBWE 3:124, 126.

[64] DBWE 12:327.

[65] DBWE 12:318-319.

sacrament is "a sign is set up in which the elements of the old creation become the elements of the new creation."[66] The elements of the sacrament "are set free from their dumb condition, from their interpretation by humankind. These elements themselves speak and say what they are."[67] In this way, Bonhoeffer operates with a distinction between epistemology and ontology, such that the created and fallen world continues to depend on God for its existence and order, but the clear connection between the Creator and the creation has been blurred, both because of the noetic effects of sin and because of the changes to the orders of the world. "Only in the sacrament is Christ the center of nature, as the mediator between nature and God," he concludes.[68]

Brunner does not understand his own project to be one in which natural theology exist as a system that ignores the hiddenness of revelation in creation apart from Christ. It is, in fact, Brunner's explicit claim to the contrary, when he writes, "The basic thought of my book is, as will be shown below, that only through Jesus or Holy Scripture do we properly understand these ordinances which are given by God and thus understand them to be the divine rule for our activity in society ('in office and calling'). These divine ordinances also make life possible for the heathen who, however, do not recognize their origin or their meaning clearly."[69]

This generally corresponds with Bonhoeffer's view of Christ as present in both the church and the state as laid out in the Christology lectures. The state is an order of

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[66] DBWE 12:327.

[67] DBWE 12:327.

[68] DBWE 12:327.

[69] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 60n4.

preservation, and in this sense has its end in Christ, so that "there has been a new relation between state and church since the historical event of the cross. The state has existed in its truest sense only since there has been a church. The true origin of the state is only found together with the church, on the cross, insofar as the cross fulfills and affirms law and order and at the same time breaks through it."[70] Bonhoeffer goes on to acknowledge the presence of Christ in both the realms of church and state but contends that the presence of Christ is only knowable from the point of view of the church. He states, "the cross of Christ is doubly present to us, in the forms of both the church and the state. Christ himself is present to us, takes shape, only in this twofold form, but is only present to us if we live by his cross."[71] Here we have an analogous depiction of the difference in perspective of those outside the church and inside the church in both Bonhoeffer and Brunner.

For Brunner, those outside the church with regard to orders like the state, "do not recognize their origin or their meaning clearly." So too for Bonhoeffer is there a similar distinction in perspective. Clifford J. Green summarizes Bonhoeffer's position well when he writes, "Yet even though political authorities, and people generally, may not know the presence of Christ in all the life of society, the church affirms it nonetheless."[72] Indeed, as Green rightly interprets, "not only the church but also the state is a form of Christ's presence. But his presence in the state is not revealed, and he is not Mediator in that form.

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[70] DBWE 12:326.

[71] DBWE 12:326.

[72] Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 221.

Bonhoeffer quotes Martin Luther (1483-1546): 'The state is "God's rule with the left hand."' It is the community of faith which acknowledges his presence in the form of the state, and it is in the form of the church that Christ is the Mediator of political life."[73]

Bonhoeffer, however, is not in complete accord with Brunner. The nuanced difference between Brunner and Bonhoeffer on this point is that for Bonhoeffer, it explicitly is Jesus Christ who is present in these preservation orders, so that the subject does not differ "fundamentally from the revelation in Jesus Christ," according to Barth's definition of natural theology.[74] It is at this point where Brunner might be judged to falter by both Bonhoeffer and by Barth, since despite the acknowledged importance of ecclesiastical perspective for natural theology, he does not make it clear that it is Christ himself who is present and revealed in ordinances such as the state. Definitions of natural theology he provides such as the following remain ambiguous: "The theologia naturalis in the subjective sense, i.e. of that knowledge of God derived from nature, of which man is capable apart from revelation in the Scriptures or in Jesus Christ."[75] For Bonhoeffer, there is no knowledge of God that is independent finally in any way of Christ, and this is in great part because of his comprehensive and rich Christology, which recognizes Christ as present not only in his earthly life and incarnation but also in a revealed way in the proclamation of the Word, the sacraments, the life of the church, and in a hidden way in the preserved orders of the world.

The orders of preservation, as expressed in Bonhoeffer's Genesis lectures,

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[73] Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 228.

[74] Barth, "No!," 75.

[75] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 43.

especially when viewed within the context of his Christology, provide a foundational framework for his understanding of natural theology. So too do they attest to a position that in important ways differs from and moves beyond both Brunner and Barth.

Vocation and Vicarious Representative Action

The orders of preservation that Bonhoeffer defends early in his theological career continue to be of significance as his work develops. These orders are sometimes called by different names, e.g. "laws of life," but there is a material continuity between the definitions provided in this period of the early 1930s and the later articulation of the divine mandates in his *Ethics*.[76] Before proceeding to explore each of the four basic mandates Bonhoeffer identifies in turn, it is important here to establish the main contours of the natural-law foundations of the mandates and connect them with two other basic elements of Bonhoeffer's social ethics, the doctrines of vocation and vicarious representative action.

We have already seen how Bonhoeffer is at pains to distinguish his doctrine of preservation orders from the received distinction between orders of creation and preservation, particularly as articulated in representative fashion by Emil Brunner. In emphasizing a doctrine of "orders" within the context of a fallen creation rather than starting from a primal state of purity and righteousness, Bonhoeffer is arguably mirroring an approach embodied by Martin Luther. As Thomas D. Pearson argues, Luther "freely revises the entire concept of 'natural law' in an effort to secure liberty of action for those

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[76] See, for instance, William F. Connor, "The Laws of Life: A Bonhoeffer Theme with Variations," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1977): 101-10.

who must make difficult decisions in congested circumstances in public life."[77] This is an approach to natural law that is fitted to the "nature" of a fallen creation rather than the ideal of a primal state of humanity. Thus Bonhoeffer distinguishes the "primal" from the "natural" in his *Ethics*: "the concept of the natural must be recovered from the gospel itself. We speak of the natural as distinct from the created, in order to include the fact of the fall into sin. We speak of the natural as distinct from the sinful in order to include the created. The natural is that which, after the fall, is directed toward the coming of Jesus Christ. The unnatural is that which, after the fall, closes itself off from the coming of Jesus Christ."[78]

Bonhoeffer's dynamic interaction with natural law approaches in the Protestant tradition can likewise be seen by comparing the substance of his theological formulations with the classical method embodied in the work of the Lutheran theologian Niels Hemmingsen (1513-1600). For Hemmingsen, the natural law is that which is oriented towards human flourishing in accord with our common human nature. In this regard, Hemmingsen's approach is consonant with the broadly Aristotelian appropriations of natural law in the Western Christian tradition. As Hemmingsen writes, the natural law commands those things that preserve the society, while prohibiting those things which are "hostile and harmful to human society."[79] Thus, writes Hemmingsen, "Whatever destroys

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[77] Thomas D. Pearson, "Luther's Pragmatic Appropriation of the Natural Law Tradition," in *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*, ed. Robert C. Baker and Roland Cap Ehlke (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 42.

[78] DBWE 6:173.

[79] Niels Hemmingsen, "On the Law of Nature in the Three States of Life, and the Proofs That This Law Is Summarized in the Decalogue," trans. Eric J. Hutchinson, *Journal of Markets & Morality* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 636.

human society and whatever overturns households and polities conflicts with nature," while "whatever preserves human society both in the domestic realm and in the political realm, this belongs to natural justice."[80]

Bonhoeffer's approach to the divine mandates/orders of preservation is to provide Christological content to the more abstract idea of human flourishing. It is not as if Christian theologians before Bonhoeffer would have opposed human flourishing and orientation toward Christ, but Bonhoeffer connects the two much more strongly and directly than is typical. Thus for Bonhoeffer the divine mandates have their beginning, coherence, and end in the person of Jesus Christ. "The commandment of God revealed in Jesus Christ embraces in its unity all of human life," write Bonhoeffer. "Its claim on human beings and the world through the reconciling love of God is all-encompassing. This commandment encounters us concretely in four different forms that find their unity only in the commandment itself, namely, in the church, marriage and family, culture, and government."[81] A key characteristic in determining the validity of a mandate in a particular historical instantiation is to judge whether it is in accord with and open for Jesus Christ. The task of responsible reformation then "consists in aligning the concrete form of the divine mandates with their origin, existence, and goal in Jesus Christ."[82] The connection of this Christological and Christotelic ordering of the mandates to ethics lies in the corresponding realities of vocation and vicarious representative action. "A mandate is to be understood simultaneously as the laying claim to, commandeering of, and

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[80] Hemmingsen, "On the Law of Nature in the Three States of Life," 641.

[81] DBWE 6:388.

[82] DBWE 6:70.

formation of a certain earthly domain by the divine command," writes Bonhoeffer. "The bearer of the mandate acts as a vicarious representative, as a stand-in for the one who issued the commission."[83]

In this way the basic understanding of vocation as a call to follow Jesus Christ is formative for Bonhoeffer's ethical approach. Although he never wrote a full systematic treatment of the topic, Bonhoeffer's theological reflections on vocation have exercised considerable influence on the development of the doctrine over the last century.[84] In addition to the treatments of vocation and related themes in *Discipleship* and *Ethics*, there are numerous individual treatises, lectures, and articles that also relate important details. Indeed, since questions like "What did Jesus want to say to us? What does he want from us today? How does he help us to be faithful Christians today?" resonate throughout Bonhoeffer's life and work, it is not surprising that a doctrine as comprehensively influential as vocation similarly echoes throughout in Bonhoeffer's corpus.[85]

The biblical and theological theme of "calling" is the basis for Bonhoeffer's doctrine of vocation, which is not surprising given the linguistic and historical connections between the related Latin (*vocatio*) and Greek (*klésis*) roots. For Bonhoeffer, the call is most generally and primarily to be understood as a call to discipleship, to follow after Jesus Christ (lit. *Nachfolge*). This call is multi-faceted, but we will focus on three of the more

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[83] DBWE 6:389.

[84] See, for example, the complimentary words of Karl Barth in CD IV/2, 533: "Easily the best that has been written on this subject is to be found in *The Cost of Discipleship*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer." Two important places in which Bonhoeffer deals with the concept of vocation at some length occur in *Discipleship*, DBWE 4:41-98; and in the section titled 'The Place of Responsibility' in the essay "History and Good [2]," contained in his *Ethics*, DBWE 6:289-97.

[85] DBWE 4:37.

relevant features here. First, this call is a call to obedience, which usually ought to be construed in its most simple and straightforward form. In this way, Bonhoeffer writes, "The call to discipleship here has no other content than Jesus Christ himself, being bound to him, community with him. But the existence of a disciple does not consist in enthusiastic respect for a good master. Instead, it is obedience toward the Son of God."[86] The call to follow Jesus Christ is a call of total obedience, encompassing the whole person in all his or her aspects.

A second aspect of this call to discipleship is taken up under the rubric of cross-bearing. The cross, writes Bonhoeffer, "is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering that everyone has to experience is the call which summons us away from our attachments to this world. It is the death of the old self in the encounter with Jesus Christ. Those who enter into discipleship enter into Jesus' death."[87] For Bonhoeffer the significance of the cross-bearing character of the Christian life could hardly be over-emphasized, since it includes the forgiveness necessary to Christian life. So he writes,

> As Christ bears our burdens, so we are to bear the burden of our sisters and brothers. The law of Christ, which must be fulfilled, is to bear the cross. The burden of a sister or brother, which I have to bear, is not only his or her external fate, manner, and temperament; rather, it is in the deepest sense his or her sin. I cannot bear it except by forgiving it, by the power of Christ's cross, which I have come to share. In this way Jesus' call to bear the cross places all who follow him in the community of forgiveness of sins. Forgiving sins is the Christ-suffering required of his disciples. It is required of all Christians.[88]

This concept of bearing the burdens of the fellow Christian is closely related to the idea of

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[86] DBWE 4:74.

[87] DBWE 4:87. See also Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 29.

[88] DBWE 4:88.

vicarious representative action (*Stellevertretung*), which is more fully developed in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and which will be taken up below.

Finally, related to the first two aspects of the call to discipleship is the responsibility to serve other Christians in love. In the new reality created by the call, the disciple is bound to Christ and therefore free for service to the fellow Christian and to the world. So, says Bonhoeffer speaking of the eschatological implications for the disciples, "In following Christ their heavenly home has become so certain that they are truly free for life in this world."[89] The security and constancy of Christ who calls lays a firm foundation for engagement with the world, in the midst of enemies and hostile forces. In this way Christians "belong not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the midst of enemies. There they find their mission, their work."[90] The Christian's vocation finds its fulfillment among the mandates of social life.

A study of Bonhoeffer's doctrine of "vicarious representative action" further illustrates how Christology informs his ethics and how the calling of the Christian takes definite ethical shape. For as Robin W. Lovin notes of "vicarious representative action," a phrase which translates the single German word *Stellvertretung*, "this christological theme runs through Bonhoeffer's theology as a whole, from his first published work to the late manuscripts of Ethics."[91] The German term *Stellvertretung* is related to the term

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[89] DBWE 4:55-56.

[90] DBWE 5:27.

[91] Robin W. Lovin, "Ethics for this World," *The Christian Century*, April 19, 2005, p. 26. Lovin points to precisely the kinds of bibliographic and methodological concerns that have been identified as endemic to the English-language scholarship. "The variety of previous English translations made it all but impossible for English readers to spot this continuity in Bonhoeffer's thought," he writes. "The use of a standard vocabulary for translation in all volumes of the new Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works largely solves that problem."

vertretung, which can simply be translated as "replacement." The *Deutsches Wörterbuch* notes two basic understandings of *Stellvertretung*, one political and the other legal.[92] The political usage has to do with the idea of someone elected or appointed to public office, someone occupying a place representing and governing in behalf of others. The legal usage has to do with the idea a courtroom or other proceedings, in which one person takes the place of the other. We might think here of someone standing in place of another before the judge, as in the case of legal counsel or representation, although reference is also made to the old Roman practice of paying a substitute to go to war or serve time in prison.

These political and legal usages of the term *Stellvertretung* provide the civil and social background for the increasing popularity of the term in German theological contexts in the nineteenth century. We can think here of the understanding of justification in the Pauline usage as particularly forensic in Lutheran emphasis as a kind of complementary or analogous movement, from legal to theological contexts. In the theological context *Stellvertretung* is used, perhaps not surprisingly, as the cognate for the Latin word *vicarius*. The *Lateinisch-Detusches und Detusches-Lateinisch Handwörterbuch* of 1855 links *vicarius* with *Stellvertretung*, which can be understood as a shortening of a longer identification, *Die Stelle einer Person oder Sache vertretend* ("the representative office of a person or thing").[93]

In this way, the term is used quite extensively in nineteenth-century German theology. Indeed, it is perhaps the most commonly used term to describe Christ's atoning

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[92] DWB 18:2275.

[93] *Lateinisch-Detusches und Detusches-Lateinisch Handwörterbuch*, ed. Karl Ernst Georges, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Hahn, 1855), s.v. "vicarius."

work. Charles Hodge (1797-1878) makes note of the usage of the term among German theologians, especially the Reformed J. H. A. Ebrard (1818-1888) of Erlangen and the Lutheran Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890), both of whom Hodge regards as "abundantly orthodox in their exposition of the nature of Christ's work," and the latter of whom Hodge praises for his "admirable treatise on 'The Vicarious Satisfaction of Christ,'" or *Ueber den festen Schriftgrund der Kirchenlehre von der stellvertretenden Genugtnuung*.[94] I. A. Dorner (1809-1884) traces "The Idea of Substitution and Satisfaction in General," in a section of his 1881 systematic work.[95]

The term was also used by those more proximate to Bonhoeffer's own time. *Stellvertretung* figures throughout the work of Reinhold Seeberg (1859-1935), who oversaw Bonhoeffer's licentiate thesis, published as *Sanctorum Communio* in 1927. In the 1905 English translation of Seeberg's *Lehrbuch*, the term is translated "substitution." The term appears as well in the work of Karl Barth. The editor's preface to the new and corrected edition of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, whose original volumes began to appear after Bonhoeffer's first published works, notes of *Stellvertretung* that it

> enshrines the notions both of representation and substitution, and never the one without the other. Representation by itself is particularly inadequate as a rendering, though this aspect is present, and the word is used more often perhaps than it ought to be in view of the prevailing prejudice against substitution. In most cases the latter is both fuller and truer, but, as the text discloses, it is given a sense more radical than is normally the case in English, because Barth envisages it as a total displacement of sinful man by the incarnate, crucified and risen Son; and also more comprehensive, because it is related to the whole life and work of Jesus Christ, including His heavenly intercession.[96]

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[94] See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (London: Thomas Nelson, 1873), 201.

[95] See "Die Idee der Stellvertretung und Genugthuung im Allgemeinen," in I. A. Dorner, *System Der Christlichen Glaubenslehre*, vol. 2 (Berlin: W. Hertz, 1881), 622-32.

[96] CD IV/1, vii-viii.

As we turn to the concept of *Stellvertretung* in Bonhoeffer's own corpus, we can see why the rather cumbersome phrase "vicarious representative action" is an especially accurate way of translating the term with respect to Bonhoeffer's usage. In the new translation of the *Ethics*, the editor's introduction by Clifford Green introduces the term in relation to an understanding of Bonhoeffer's "ethic of tyrannicide." Green writes that *Stellvertretung* "is central to Bonhoeffer's theology and it refers, first of all, to the free initiative and responsibility for humanity that God takes in Jesus Christ; in God's becoming human, in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God acts to reconcile and re-create humanity."[97] This is the fundamental usage of the term in Bonhoeffer that corresponds to its traditional place in German theology, as a way of describing the atoning work, both in terms of what has sometimes been called Christ's active and passive obedience.

But beyond this traditional and foundational understanding of the concept, vicarious representative action represents a concept at the ethical core of Bonhoeffer's thought. As Green writes, "the human ethical analogy [to Christ's work] is acting responsibly on behalf of others and equally on behalf of communities to which we belong."[98] The concept of vicarious representative action is constitutive for Bonhoeffer's ethical argument for our mandate to follow Christ and become like him, *imitatio Christi*. As Lovin writes of the mature expression of *Stellvertretung*, "Responsible action now gains some theological depth. It is not simply a grand gesture by the responsible person,

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[97] DBWE 6:12.

[98] DBWE 6:12.

nor a paternalistic service offered by one who happens to be well placed enough to do for others what they could not do for themselves. Responsible action is a true imitation of Christ, a willingness to be despised and abused for the sake of those who have themselves been despised."[99]

[99] Lovin, "Ethics for this World," 26.

CHAPTER 4

MARRIAGE & FAMILY

As the National Socialist regime in Germany increasingly threatened the nation and even the world with dissolution, Dietrich Bonhoeffer likewise came to recognize the times as "out of joint, when lawlessness and wickedness arrogantly triumph."[1] But even in the early 1930s Bonhoeffer contended that there were serious social problems facing the German people. "Marriage and family are experiencing a violent crisis," Bonhoeffer observed in a 1932 lecture, as these institutions faced challenges from worldly ideologies like individualism and socialism.[2] Bonhoeffer identified the pressing ethical challenge in this context to be the identification and affirmation of God's orders of preserving grace. Within another context, Bonhoeffer described the need for "a rehabilitation of the bourgeoisie as we know it in our families, and precisely from a Christian perspective."[3]

Whereas Bonhoeffer draws the line of distinction between orders of creation and orders of preservation at the Fall, his older Reformed contemporary Emil Brunner finds both in effect after the Fall. For Bonhoeffer, the orders are different before and after the Fall. For Brunner, there are new orders of preservation that arise alongside the already existing creation orders. For Brunner, in fact, the ethical challenge of the day was to rightly understand these differences: "The distinction between this 'ordinance of creation' from a mere 'ordinance of preservation' relative to sin, such as the State, is made for sound

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[1] DBWE 6:347.

[2] DBWE 11:248.

[3] DBWE 8:182.

theological reasons. It is necessary for a Christian *theologia naturalis, i.e.* for Christian theological thinking which tries to account for the phenomena of natural life."[4] This doctrine, contended Brunner, was critical for contemporary ethical thought. "It is the task of our theological generation to find the way back to a true *theologia naturalis*," he writes.[5]

For Brunner, "monogamous marriage" exists as an institution "of higher dignity than the State because, as an institution, as an ordinance, it is–apart from special concrete cases–unrelated to sin."[6] Bonhoeffer acknowledges that marriage did not come into existence as an institution on account of the Fall into sin. He thus recognizes the scriptural witness that marriage, along with work, are found "both in the Bible, already in paradise, attesting that they belong to God's creation, which exists through and toward Jesus Christ."[7] And thus "even after the fall, i.e., in the form in which alone we know them, both still remain divine orders of discipline and grace, because God desires to be revealed even to the fallen world as the Creator, and because God allows the world to exist in Christ and makes the world Christ's own. Marriage and work exist from the beginning under an appointed divine mandate that must be performed in faithful obedience to God."[8] There is

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[4] Emil Brunner, "Nature and Grace," in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002; repr. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), 29-30. This section comparing Brunner and Bonhoeffer updates expositions that have previously appeared in Jordan J. Ballor, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Two Kingdoms, and Christian Social Thought Today," *La Revue Farel* 6-7 (2011-2012): 70-72; and Jordan J. Ballor, "Christ in Creation: Bonhoeffer's Orders of Preservation and the Question of Natural Theology," *Journal of Religion* 86, no. 1 (January 2006): 8-10.

[5] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 59.

[6] Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 29.

[7] DBWE 16:519.

[8] DBWE 16:519.

a sense in which, then, Bonhoeffer acknowledges the basic reality of the distinction between creation and preservation orders that Brunner finds so significant.

At the same time, however, Bonhoeffer attacks the relevance of such a distinction and denies its validity. This distinction between orders of creation and orders of preservation is problematic for Bonhoeffer precisely because all of creation has been affected by sin. Indeed, in Bonhoeffer's judgment, the noetic effects of sin seem to negate our ability to properly judge between that which is strictly of preservation and that which is of creation. For Bonhoeffer, those who argue on the basis of orders of creation do not realize "that the world has fallen and that sin now rules and that the creation and sin are so intertwined that no human eye can see them as separate, that every human order is the order of the fallen world and not of creation."[9] It is precisely in this denial of creation orders combined with the affirmation of preservation orders that Bonhoeffer is seeking to do justice to the full implications of the Fall while still maintaining some basis for the church's concrete ethical proclamations.

As we have seen, Bonhoeffer recognizes the biblical witness that marriage existed prior to the Fall. His contention here then is to be understood as epistemological as well as ontological. We might know from Scripture, for instance, that marriage was instituted before the Fall, and thus in Brunner's parlance was founded "unrelated to sin." Without special revelation, however, the origins of marriage would be essentially ambiguous. Such a worldly perspective would wonder, for example, whether marriage had "not proved sufficiently that it leads to human catastrophes, that it has become an outdated, lifeless

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[9] DBWE 11:363.

form?"[10] From a Christian perspective we might certainly be expected to affirm that marriage was not instituted as an order of preservation with fallen nature in view. But it is not unaided natural reason that provides us with this insight.

Furthermore, Bonhoeffer emphasizes the ontic nature of the change in all aspects of creation after the Fall. Thus whether or not an institution existed prior to or came into existence as a consequence of the Fall as a preservative measure is irrelevant. All orders are now preservation orders because their fundamental character has changed in relation to the reality of sin. All orders now exist to preserve human social life in the context of sin and to orient us towards Christ. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, "God's new action with humankind is to uphold and preserve humankind in its fallen world, in its fallen orders, for death—for the resurrection, for the new creation, for Christ."[11] This has consequences not only for the character of these individual institutions after the Fall, in the case of marriage related to questions like divorce which we will discuss below, but for the interrelations between these mandates.

In the case of marriage and its relationship to government and church, there is a mutual limitation and relative autonomy or sovereignty that attends to each mandate. Bonhoeffer denies the relevance of a creation vs. preservation distinction in order to promote a hierarchy of institutions. Instead, he uses the recognition of the different realms and their origins in God to establish the independence and proper authority of each mandate. "There was human marriage before any other different groupings of human community came into being. Marriage was given with the creation of the first human

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[10] DBWE 11:248.

[11] DBWE 3:140.

beings. Its right is rooted in the beginnings of humanity," writes Bonhoeffer.[12] Thus "marriage and work have their own origin in God that is not established by government but is to be acknowledged by it."[13] Because marriage arises neither from government nor church, but rather out of God's direct command, "that means government possesses for this realm only regulative but not constitutive significance. Marriage is contracted not by government but before government."[14] The same goes for the church as well: "Marriages are concluded neither *by* the church nor *by* the state and do not receive their right in the first place from these institutions. Marriage is concluded rather *by* the two marriage partners. The fact that marriage is publicly concluded *in the presence of* the state and *in the presence of* the church means nothing else than public recognition of the marriage and of its inherent rights by state and church."[15]

What is true for marriage and family is in fact true for the other mandates as well. Each one receives its origin and authority from Christ. Each one is a valid form of Christ's command, and therefore does not derive its authority from other worldly realities. The autonomy or sovereignty of these orders is thus relative rather than absolute: "Thus precisely in their genuine worldliness, worldly orders stand under the dominion of Christ. This and nothing else is their 'autonomy'—'autonomous,' that is, not with respect to the law of Christ, but with respect to earthly heteronomies."[16] Early in his career Bonhoeffer

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[12] DBWE 6:204.

[13] DBWE 16:520.

[14] DBWE 16:520.

[15] DBWE 6:205.

[16] DBWE 16:546.

had faced the difficulty "of finding a hierarchy in the divine orders," and we can see that in his attempts to distinguish preservation and creation orders Brunner is attempting to establish just such a hierarchy.[17] In denying this hierarchical ordering of orders, so to speak, Bonhoeffer is attempting to do justice to his understanding of the Reformation's legacy. Thus he writes that "the Lutheran doctrine of the three estates" (familial, political, ecclesial) had the "decisive characteristic and enduring significance" in "its ranking of these estates *alongside* one another rather than in any sort of hierarchical arrangement."[18] Bonhoeffer's replacement of "estates" with "mandates" is an attempt to preserve this "decisive characteristic" and recast it with an emphasis on the divine, personal word of command rather than a static, abstract principle of action.

The Purposes of Marriage and Family

One reason that recovery and recognition of these mandates in their relative authority and autonomy is so necessary is because not only do they relate us to Christ, but they also serve to relate us to one another. In this way, the proper doctrine of the orders of preservation or divine mandates upsets the twin errors of individualism and collectivism. "We are not only individuals, but we are also placed within life-communities," writes Bonhoeffer.[19] These "life-communities" bind us together with mutual responsibilities and duties arising out of love and, ultimately, out of and for Jesus Christ. The calling of a parent, for instance, is to be understood within the norms of the familial life-community and the vicarious

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[17] DBWE 10:369. Cf. Brunner, "Nature and Grace," 29-30.

[18] DBWE 16:549.

[19] DBWE 11:254.

representative action that attends to that membership. “Individuals do not act merely for themselves alone; each individual incorporates the selves of several people, perhaps even a very large number,” writes Bonhoeffer. “The father of a family, for example, can no longer act as if he were merely an individual. In his own self, he incorporates the selves of those family members for whom he is responsible. Everything he does is determined by this sense of responsibility. Any attempt to act and live as if he were alone would not only abdicate his responsibility, but also deny at the same time the reality on which his responsibility is based.”[20] The attempt to withdraw from or deny the concrete responsibilities that are embedded within the identity of fatherhood does not dissolve those responsibilities. Instead, argues Bonhoeffer, in such cases “he does not cease to be the father of a family; rather, instead of being a good father, he is now simply a bad one. He is a good father if he takes on and acts according to the responsibility reality places on him.”[21] Again and again Bonhoeffer will use the mandates as a rule for determining whether in a concrete instance a person has fulfilled or shirked his or her calling to act as a responsible representative.

Each of the mandates has its own unique purposes and characteristics fitted for that purpose. In the case of marriage, Bonhoeffer identifies the basic purposes to consist bodily union and procreation. Other important purposes, including the moral formation and education of children and the mutual aid of spouses, can be developed from and related to these basic purposes.

At its most basic, “In human marriage what is most individual is bound to what is

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[20] DBWE 6:221.

[21] DBWE 6:221.

most general, leaping over all categories in between. It is a matter of the union of two human beings as human beings, based on the free decision of each individual."[22] The Christian church has traditionally acknowledged procreation as the basic purpose for marriage, but for Bonhoeffer the joy that attends to bodily union within the context of marriage is just as foundational. Thus, he writes, "Sexuality is not only a means of procreation, but, independent of this purpose, embodies joy within marriage in the love of two people for each other."[23] The significance of bodily union in marriage is found in Adam's joyous declaration that Eve "is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23).

A corollary to this bodily union is the connection of human beings in loving community and the resulting responsibilities and desires to love and care for one another. It is in this context that Bonhoeffer refers to the "assistance" offered by Eve as "truly the essence of marriage."[24] In one of his daily meditations toward the end of his life, Bonhoeffer writes, "You are my helper for body, soul, and spirit; you comfort my body, my soul, my spirit—this is what people, whom God has created for one another as male and female, say to each other."[25] Likewise in a marriage sermon given a decade earlier Bonhoeffer preached that "Life is service—love is service—marriage is service—it is God's will that we serve him by serving our neighbour."[26] For Bonhoeffer, Christian

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[22] DBWE 6:204.

[23] DBWE 6:188.

[24] DBWE 16:630.

[25] DBWE 16:630.

[26] DBWE 13:359.

marriage consists of mutual service and self-sacrifice, and thus “will become a parable of Christ’s self-sacrificial love for his church-community.”[27] And so “in marriage human beings become one before God, as Christ becomes one with the church.”[28]

It is out of this bodily union that God has ordained human beings capable of procreation, a second basic purpose of marriage. “God blesses such becoming one with fruitfulness, with the procreation of new life,” writes Bonhoeffer. “Through marriage human beings are procreated for the glory and service of Jesus Christ and the enlarging of Christ’s kingdom.”[29] This purpose is not exhausted in the mere act of conception or birth, but rather comprehends the entire responsibility to raise a family. In this way, “Marriage is the place where children not only are born but also are educated into obedience to Jesus Christ. As their procreators and educators, parents are commissioned by God to be representatives [Stellvertreter] of God for the children.”[30]

A refreshing aspect of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of marriage and family is its emphasis on joy. In a world where responsibilities and duties are often viewed as stultifying and enslaving, the mandate of marriage and family is one in which Bonhoeffer exults and invites others to do likewise. Part of this has to do with the positive construal of marriage as not simply meeting the requirements for some divine law but rather fulfilling the purposes for which human beings are created. For Bonhoeffer the dynamism of the divine mandates involves a joyful immersion in the good things of this world. Thus “The

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[27] DBWE 4:249.

[28] DBWE 6:71.

[29] DBWE 6:71.

[30] DBWE 6:71.

commandment of God becomes the element 'in' which one lives, even without always being aware of it. The commandment as the element of life means freedom of movement and activity, freedom from fear to act or to make a decision. It means certainty, calm, confidence, equanimity, joy."[31]

In the case of marriage, "When I love my wife and affirm marriage as instituted by God, then my marriage acquires an inner freedom and a confidence of how to live and act that no longer suspiciously observes every step I make nor calls my every action into question."[32] On this understanding the commandments, such as "the prohibition of adultery," does not become the basic touchstone of our human activity. Instead, "marriage as kept and freely affirmed, which means moving beyond the prohibition of adultery, is actually the prerequisite for fulfilling the divine commission of marriage. Here the divine commandment has become permission to live married life freely and confidently."[33]

An Affirmation of Marriage

Against the dissolution of marriage and family that he observed during the rise to power of the Nazi regime, Bonhoeffer asserted the importance of recovering the natural foundations of these institutions in Jesus Christ. This was not simply an academic exercise. For Bonhoeffer, theology and biography were closely related, in that his theology was developed in concert with his lived experiences. He worked not only to understand but to

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[31] DBWE 6:381-382. Contrast this with Marsh's evaluation of marriage in Bonhoeffer's thought, in which it "had always been equated with duty, obligation, necessity and law: an arrangement necessitated by original sin." See Charles Marsh, *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 362.

[32] DBWE 6:382.

[33] DBWE 6:382.

live out his faith.

Perhaps nowhere is this connection between theology and life more evident than in Bonhoeffer's engagement to Maria von Wedemeyer. The match was incongruous in many ways. Bonhoeffer was nearly two decades older, and at the time of their engagement they had been acquainted for less than a year. Maria was not only younger, but she was also young: eighteen years old when they were engaged. It was not long after their engagement that Bonhoeffer was arrested by the Gestapo on April 5, 1943. Bonhoeffer had been increasingly involved in a movement against Hitler since his return to Germany from America in 1939.[34] He was part of the *Abwehr* conspiracy, so named because it centered on officials involved in the military intelligence arm of the German armed forces, particularly Admiral Wilhelm Canaris (1887-1945), the head of the *Abwehr* since 1935. Bonhoeffer had been working as a civilian operative/informant for the *Abwehr*, which was cover for his involvement in the conspiracy. His arrest was related to irregularities associated with "Operation Seven," an *Abwehr* plan to smuggle Jews into Switzerland under the pretence of planting spies. It was only after Bonhoeffer had been imprisoned for more than a year, the failure of the July 20, 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler (part of the "Valkyrie" plot involving Klaus von Stauffenberg), and the subsequent discovery of the Zossen files, which had been collected by the conspirators to document Nazi crimes, that Bonhoeffer was implicated in the conspiracy. He was then moved from Tegel Prison to the high-security Gestapo facility in Berlin, before being sent to the Flossenbürg concentration

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[34] For Bonhoeffer's two trips to America, see Jordan J. Ballor, "Bonhoeffer in America—A Review Essay," *Christian Scholar's Review* 37, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 465-482. For Bonhoeffer's evaluation of America, see his essay, "Protestantism without Reformation," in DBWE 15:438-462.

camp by way of Buchenwald. Bonhoeffer was executed, along with other members of the conspiracy, on April 9, 1945.

It was in the midst of his involvement in this conspiracy that Bonhoeffer nevertheless engaged the young Maria von Wedemeyer. Their correspondence had not been published until after Maria's death in 1977, that it was released first in German in 1992 and later in English.[35] From these letters we get a glimpse into Bonhoeffer's attitude toward marriage, even in the midst of great social and personal upheaval. In a wonderfully moving passage, Bonhoeffer articulates the substance of his affirmation of God's mandates even, and perhaps especially, in crisis. Writing to Maria on August 12, 1943 from Tegel prison, Bonhoeffer confesses that "when I consider the state of the world, the total obscurity enshrouding our personal destiny, and my present imprisonment, our union—if it wasn't frivolity, which it certainly wasn't—can only be a token of God's grace and goodness, which summon us to believe in him."[36] Bonhoeffer goes on to invoke the example of the prophet Jeremiah, who in the face of the Babylonian exile nevertheless bought land (Jer. 32), "a token of confidence in the future."[37] For Bonhoeffer, marriage was an affirmation of God's earth, even in the context of brokenness, suffering, and loss. This confidence in the future, writes Bonhoeffer, demands faith, "the faith that endures *in* the world and loves and remains true to that world in spite of all the hardships it brings us. Our marriage must be a 'yes' to God's earth. It must strengthen our resolve to do and

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[35] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Love Letters from Cell 92: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Maria von Wedemeyer, 1943-1945*, ed. Ruth-Alice von Bismarck and Ulrich Kabitz, trans. John Brownjohn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

[36] Bonhoeffer, *Love Letters from Cell 92*, 63-64.

[37] Bonhoeffer, *Love Letters from Cell 92*, 64.

accomplish something on earth. I fear that Christians who venture to stand on earth on only one leg will stand in heaven on only one leg too."[38]

This conviction that participation in the divine mandate of marriage was an affirmation of God's creation was not something that Bonhoeffer viewed as unique to his personal situation. Years earlier in a letter to Erwin Sutz Bonhoeffer had counseled his friend that the decision to marry was the choice of someone who "dares to take a step of such affirmation of the earth and its future."[39] It had become clear to Bonhoeffer, through his participation in many weddings during these times, "that a person could take this step as a Christian truly only from within a very strong faith and on the basis of grace. For here in the midst of the final destruction of all things, one desires to build; in the midst of a life lived from hour to hour and from day to day, one desires a future; in the midst of being driven out from the earth, one desires a bit of space; in the midst of widespread misery, one desires some happiness."[40] Not only is this act of marriage an affirmation by human beings, but it is also an affirmation by God of his creation: "the overwhelming thing is that God says yes to this strange longing, that here God consents to our will, whereas it is usually meant to be just the opposite. Thus marriage becomes something quite new, powerful, marvelous—for us who wish to be Christians in Germany."[41]

There is an apocryphal saying attributed to Martin Luther, that "if I knew the world was to end tomorrow, I would still plant an apple tree today." As Scott H. Hendrix has

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[38] Bonhoeffer, *Love Letters from Cell 92*, 64.

[39] DBWE 16:220.

[40] DBWE 16:220-221.

[41] DBWE 16:221.

written, this quote remains unverified, and it is thought to have "originated in the German Confessing Church, which used it to inspire hope and perseverance during its opposition to the Nazi dictatorship."[42] Whether or not Bonhoeffer was aware of the quotation or its provenance, it captures well his attitude toward God's orders of preservation even "in the face of these 'last' times," as he put it to Erwin Sutz.[43] Even when the world seemed as if it were to end tomorrow, Bonhoeffer still affirmed marriage today.

Divorce

Bonhoeffer understood the institution of marriage to be distressed in his time, and in this regard there is a clear continuity between his time and ours. This fundamental institution of social life is undergoing significant changes, both in terms of understanding and practice, within and without the church. A recent statement by Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) on marriage highlights some of the challenges:

> As the most venerable and reliable basis for domestic happiness, marriage is the foundation of a just and stable society. Yet in our times this institution has been gravely weakened by the sexual revolution and the damage it has done to marriage and the family: widespread divorce; the dramatic increase in out-of-wedlock births; the casual acceptance of premarital sex and cohabitation; and a contraceptive mentality which insists that sex has an arbitrary relation to procreation. In this environment, families fragment, the poor suffer, and children are especially vulnerable and at risk. The decline of marriage culture is evident throughout the world, and where it is evident, the common good is imperiled.[44]

Bonhoeffer spoke directly to at least two of these phenomena, albeit briefly: divorce and

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[42] Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 90.

[43] DBWE 16:220.

[44] Evangelicals and Catholics Together, "The Two Shall Become One Flesh: Reclaiming Marriage," *First Things*, March 2015, 24.

contraception (in connection with the phenomenon of abortion). In the following sections I will attempt to outline Bonhoeffer's teachings on these subjects and highlight how they might inform our understanding and approaches to these contemporary ethical challenges.

Bonhoeffer's explicit discussions of divorce are best understood within the broader context of the historical development of the Christian teaching on marriage. John Witte Jr. has masterfully surveyed the lines of development in a number of relevant works.[45] Although there are differences between the ways different Protestant traditions grounded and articulated their respective views of marriage, the basic movement is from an ancient and medieval view of marriage as sacramental, which is continued in the Roman Catholic tradition, to a view of marriage as a covenant in Protestantism, to marriage conceived as a contract in the period of the Enlightenment and beyond. The divergences between these various views turn on different formulations of the relationship between the church and the state, between individual rights and social institutions, and between God and human beings. These are complex and intriguing questions that must simply be bracketed for the purposes of a brief explication of Bonhoeffer's views on marriage and divorce, but it is helpful to understand that Bonhoeffer largely fits within a Protestant approach that can be distinguished from a sacramental view as well as from a liberal contractual view.

An initial survey of Bonhoeffer's direct discussions of divorce might seem to make such a judgment problematic, however, as Bonhoeffer's assertions regarding the

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[45] See, for instance, John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*, 2d ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012); idem, "More Than a Mere Contract: Marriage as Contract and Covenant in Law and Theology," in *God's Joust, God's Justice: Law and Religion in the Western Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 364-385; and, more popularly, idem, "The Meanings of Marriage," *First Things*, October 2002, 30-41. See also John Witte Jr. and Eliza Ellison, eds., *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

indissolubility of marriage echo a sacramental rather than a covenantal view. For instance, in *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer engages Jesus' discussions concerning the Mosiac dispensation for divorce (Matt. 5:31-32). Jesus "sanctifies marriage according to the law by declaring it to be unbreakable. Even in cases where one party divorces the other because of infidelity," writes Bonhoeffer, "he prohibits the other from remarrying."[46] Similarly, in a wedding sermon written for the union of his friend Eberhard Bethge with his niece, Renate Schleicher, on May 15, 1943, Bonhoeffer wrote that "God makes your marriage indissoluble and protects it from any internal or external danger. God wills to be the guarantor of its permanence."[47] Perhaps on this point Bonhoeffer simply broke from the traditional teachings of the Reformation churches, Lutheran and Reformed, that held to a more permissive understanding of the biblical teachings on marriage.

There are a number of reasons to believe, however, that Bonhoeffer did not hold to a traditional sacramental view of marriage along the lines of Roman Catholicism, and together these reasons make a plausible case that Bonhoeffer should be understood as representing a variation of the traditional Protestant conception. A hint at a reconciliation between Bonhoeffer and a covenantal or "social estate" view (as Witte terms the Lutheran view) comes in the following passages of *Discipleship*.[48] Thus Bonhoeffer writes, "It appears that Jesus contradicts Old Testament law by demanding that marriage be indissoluble." However, Jesus "explains his conformity with Mosaic law" in Matthew 19:8: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it

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[46] DBWE 4:126.

[47] DBWE 8:84.

[48] See Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 113-158.

was not this way from the beginning." As Bonhoeffer interprets it, Jesus' explanation of divorce "means it was permitted only to keep their hearts from even greater wantonness."[49]

There are two basic implications of this that are of special note. First, a distinction appears in Jesus' statement that the Mosaic allowance for divorce "was not this way from the beginning" (Matt. 19:8). Jesus roots his teaching on marriage in the institution of marriage in creation, as a pristine order. Likewise Bonhoeffer here treats Christian marriage from the perspective of a sanctified and consummated reality. This is a markedly different approach than we find in Bonhoeffer's description and explication of the orders of preservation or divine mandates. These are orders that are aimed at the preservation of human society with sin in view. In this context of a fallen creation, a dispensation or allowance "to keep their hearts from even greater wantonness," as Bonhoeffer puts it, would seem entirely appropriate. In other places, particularly in the case of procreation and contraception as we shall see below, Bonhoeffer makes it clear that he desires to distinguish his view of marriage from that Roman Catholic sacramental view. In the context of discussing marriage requirements (so-called "impediments to marriage"), Bonhoeffer criticizes Roman Catholic teaching that "robs marriage of its essentially natural character and its natural right and turns an order of nature into an order of grace or of salvation."[50]

A second distinction can be understood as complementary and as a way of

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[49] DBWE 4:127.

[50] DBWE 6:204. On the Lutheran alteration of received canon legal doctrines on impediments to marriage, see Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 145-149.

resolving this apparent antinomy in Bonhoeffer's thought. We might distinguish the view of marriage that is appropriate for different institutions and from different perspectives. This is a distinction that is explicit in Bonhoeffer's treatment in *Discipleship*: "Christ is Lord even of the followers' marriage. This causes the marriage of disciples to be something different than civil marriage, but, again, this is not contempt for marriage, but precisely its sanctification."[51] Bonhoeffer has primarily in view here the institution of marriage as a sanctified institution rather than a civil institution. This means that there might be a legitimate difference between the way that marriage is treated by civil and ecclesiastical authorities: the former primarily as an order of preservation and the latter with a greater emphasis on the eschatological significance of the institution. When combined with Bonhoeffer's statements about the institution of marriage originating independently of church and state, we have a clear affirmation of marriage as both "an order of nature" and space for distinct legislation and postures towards marriage by ecclesiastical and civil authorities.[52]

Thus, from a sanctified, ecclesiastical perspective, marriage might be viewed as indissoluble, and divorce only permissible on strict grounds articulated by Jesus (Matt. 5:32; cf. 1 Cor. 7:10-16) with no further allowance for remarriage. From the perspective of the civil authorities, the preservative and restraining aspects of marriage may be emphasized, which could allow for different and more permissive regulations concerning divorce in various times and places. What we encounter in Bonhoeffer's view, then, is a

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[51] DBWE 4:127.

[52] For the case of Johannes Apel (1486-1536), which stands at the origin of Lutheran teaching on marriage, see Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, 116-118.

perspective on marriage as a social institution rooted in the commandment of God for the maintenance and propagation of human beings with eschatological import. Marriage is thus neither a sacrament in the Roman Catholic sense nor a personal, private contract in the liberal, Enlightenment sense. It is, rather, a social estate that includes both a personal, direct autonomy derived from God's commandment as well as a public institution. In his sermon written for Eberhard Bethge and Renate Schleicher, Bonhoeffer writes, "Your love belongs only to you personally; marriage is something beyond the personal, an estate [ein Stand], an office."[53]

Abortion

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's discussions of abortion center in a direct discussion of the issue that appears in the essay "Natural Life" in his *Ethics*. In a section titled "Reproduction and Developing Life," Bonhoeffer writes, "Marriage involves acknowledging the right of life that will come into being, but this is not a right that is at the disposal of the married couple."[54] This statement represents Bonhoeffer's consistent approach to emphasize the natural rights of the individual person but to contextualize these within the demands of social life. Bonhoeffer places a kind of social mortgage on the exercise of natural individual rights, and this includes the rights to marry and procreate. In cases where this "right of life that will come into being" is not acknowledged, contends Bonhoeffer, there is no marriage but simply a contractual relationship: "In acknowledging this right, however, space is given to the free creative power of God, who can will to let new life come forth

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[53] DBWE 8:83.

[54] DBWE 6:206.

from this marriage."[55] Marriage must include a basic disposition of openness to God's commandments, including an openness to life for which God has ordained the institution.

What follows is perhaps the clearest statement against the morality of abortion that one might imagine: "To kill the fruit in the mother's womb is to injure the right to life that God has bestowed on the developing life. Discussion of the question whether a human being is already present confuses the simple fact that, in any case, God wills to create a human being and that the life of this developing human being has been deliberately taken. And this is nothing but murder."[56] The clear emphasis here is on God's initiative and God's purpose. God has ordained marriage in part for the reproduction of human beings, and to intentionally obstruct this purpose by killing the "fruit in the mother's womb" is deemed "nothing but murder."

Clifford J. Green rightly points to the important contextual considerations that must influence the interpretation of these passages, including the practices of the National Socialist regime. As Green writes, "The manuscript presents Bonhoeffer's theological protest against attempts by worldly authorities to decide what is natural, and to exercise control over various bodily rights."[57] There is no doubt that rejection of Nazi tyranny over natural rights to liberty and responsibility are in view. But likewise, as Green notes, the Nazi eugenic program "that is not the only circumstance and motive he addresses in his one brief paragraph on abortion."[58]

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[55] DBWE 6:206.

[56] DBWE 6:206.

[57] DBWE 6:24.

[58] DBWE 6:25.

That Bonhoeffer's comments on abortion cannot be limited to protests against unjust governmental intrusions is readily apparent from the textual treatment itself. Bonhoeffer goes on to consider pastoral considerations, particularly related to questions of the guilt of the mother, which would have been entirely superfluous if the abortion was coerced without the consent of the mother. In this way, Bonhoeffer surveys "various motives" that may lead someone to commit the act of abortion: "It may be a deed of despair from the depths of human desolation or financial need, in which case guilt falls often more on the community than on the individual."[59] The mother may be driven by various factors to this decision, but it remains a decision nonetheless.[60]

For these reasons, Green's concerns that Bonhoeffer's statements not be taken as indicative of "a general principle on abortion that would apply to quite different cases and contexts" seems to obfuscate rather than illuminate.[61] It is true that Bonhoeffer's ethical thought does not operate with a method of deriving formal, general principles from concrete contexts that might then be applied through casuistic reasoning to particular instances. But Bonhoeffer does operate with a view of moral obligation that corresponds to objective and transcendent norms that apply across different historical contexts. The mandate of marriage may not be a formal ethical principle from which moral entailments

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[59] DBWE 6:206.

[60] See DBWE 6:207: "The mother, for whom this decision would be desperately hard because it goes against her own nature, would certainly be the last to deny the weight of guilt." This line is not included in the German editions. See DBWE 6:207n126. Cf. DBW 6:187.

[61] DBWE 6:25. No doubt part of the concern here over the validity of the appeal to Bonhoeffer on the part of those who committed violent acts, and even murder, against abortion providers. See Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 71-72, 170-173. For an assessment similar to Green's, see also Richard Weikart, *The Myth of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Is His Theology Evangelical?* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1997), 105.

might be directly derived, but Bonhoeffer's purpose here is to provide ethical judgment in a sense that will apply in a more general way than to simply cases in which Nazi eugenicists are coercing abortions among undesirable populations. Thus Timothy Larsen concludes, that in spite of legitimate appeals to the contextuality of Bonhoeffer's thought, "Nevertheless, it is a deployment but not a distortion for the pro-life movement to evoke Dietrich Bonhoeffer."[62]

Green further warns that "making such an extrapolation the justification for state legislation is doubly problematic since in this manuscript Bonhoeffer defends the rights of the individual against state intrusion."[63] It is true that Bonhoeffer is concerned here, as Green rightly notes, with tyrannical acts of the National Socialist regime. But again, this does not exhaust the relevance of Bonhoeffer's observations. He makes it clear that abortion is murder, and elsewhere Bonhoeffer definitively articulates a positive role for the state in protecting the rights of individuals, including against bodily harm.[64]

Much of the modern discourse surrounding abortion revolves around the rights of

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[62] Timothy Larsen, "The Evangelical Reception of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 50.

[63] DBWE 6:25. On the question of sterilization, see DBWE 6:212: "Without doubt it [state-compelled sterilization] involves a grave intrusion into the human right to bodily inviolability, and the danger is overwhelmingly great that once this boundary has been crossed—even in an ultimately responsible way—soon all the boundaries that are set by the human right to bodily inviolability will fall."

[64] See, for instance, from a lecture on the "Catalogs of Vices," DBWE 14:730: "Sins against the community, summarized in 'murder.'" This will also be discussed in the subsequent chapter on government, but see also DBWE 16:514-515: "Government serves Christ inasmuch as it establishes and preserves an external righteousness by wielding the sword given to it, and it alone, in God's stead. In this it has not only the negative task of punishing the wicked but also the positive task of commending the good as well as the godly (1 Peter 2:14!). It is thereby granted, on the one hand, legal power, and, on the other hand, the right to educate for the good—that is, for outward justice."

the individual to choose how to define one's own meaning and existence. In a remarkable passage of a joint opinion co-authored with Justices Souter and O'Connor, United States Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy writes, "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life. Beliefs about these matters could not define the attributes of personhood were they formed under compulsion of the State."[65] The court goes on to define the line of viability as that which begins the delimitation of the mother's right to terminate a pregnancy. Before viability, the unborn child is considered to be part of the mother's body to be disposed of in accordance with her rights to personal liberty. But Bonhoeffer's basic position is in conflict with even this account of the mother's right to choose. In his discussion of suicide, for instance, Bonhoeffer denies a principle of absolute self-ownership and instead asserts the moral responsibility of the individual before God: "Neither I nor anyone else can claim an absolute right to dispose over the parts of the body that God has given me."[66]

The difference here revolves on the definition of liberty. Indeed, Bonhoeffer is concerned to articulate and defend a proper understanding of liberty. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, in the case of proper use of contraception, "We need to make room for the freedom of a conscience responsible to God."[67] In this context, the freedom of conscience

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[65] *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (29 June 1992), p. 851.

[66] DBWE 6:212.

[67] DBWE 6:210. Cf. a letter to Eberhard Bethge, February 10, 1941, DBWE 16:148: "I am now working on the question of marriage (the right of free choice of one's spouse, marriage laws according to confessional or racial considerations [Rome, Nuremberg], sterilization, birth control). In all these matters the Catholic moral code is in fact almost unbearably legalistic." See also Bonhoeffer's analysis of The Report of the Federal Council of Churches on Birth Control, DBWE

for Bonhoeffer is circumscribed by and oriented to the objective divine mandate of marriage. The distinction between these two approaches, one which would permit abortion and the other which would sharply circumscribe it, correlates to a distinction Bonhoeffer makes between types of freedom. “Being free *from* something is experienced only in being free *for* something,” writes Bonhoeffer. “Being free solely in order to be free, however, leads to anarchy.”[68] For this reason, arguments simply amounting to freedom from state intervention or oversight are inadequate, because they lead to the moral anarchy of relativism: “Biblically, freedom means being free for service to God and to one’s neighbor, being free for obedience to the commands of God. This presupposes being free from every internal and external pressure that hinders us in this service. Being free means, therefore, not the dissolution of all authority but living within the authorities and bonds ordered and *limited* by God’s word.”[69]

For Bonhoeffer, the questions of freedoms from external constraint are secondary to questions of positive responsibility. The former must be determined by the latter, and are means to that end. Thus, concludes Bonhoeffer, “freedom is in the first place not an *individual* right but a *responsibility*; freedom is not in the first place oriented toward the individual but toward the neighbor.”[70] There is nowhere that this responsibility is more foundational and determinative of human activity than in the divine institution of marriage.

10:437: “It is interesting to see, that the issue of fight between Protestants and Catholics turns to be an ethical one, since the dogmatical is no longer understood by Protestants.”

[68] DBWE 16:532.

[69] DBWE 16:532.

[70] DBWE 16:532.

CHAPTER 5

CULTURE & WORK

For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the order of culture or work (he uses various terms to describe this mandate) has to do with fulfillment of the so-called cultural mandate or blessing of Genesis 1:28: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” Thus, if we understand *culture* to refer not to primarily to the artifacts of civilizational achievement, such as art, but rather to the human activity and institutions that interact with and develop the created order, then it is appropriate to call this order the mandate of culture.[1] Similarly if we understand *work* to refer not primarily to human labor in the economic realm, but rather as human activity oriented towards the service of God through the service of others (whether remunerated or not), then we can call this order the mandate of work.

In this way the ideas of culture and work are closely related for Bonhoeffer, albeit not precisely interchangeable. At some points, he speaks as if culture arises out of the mandate of work: “for the sake of Jesus Christ a special right preserves marriage and with it the family and preserves work and with it economic life, culture, science, and art.”[2] These broader conceptions of work and culture are at odds with modern formulations that would attribute them to narrow, discrete aspects of human life. The shift in the understanding of a

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[1] For his listing of “culture” rather than “work” among the four mandates, see DBWE 6:388, 402-403.

[2] DBWE 16:520.

doctrine like vocation, for instance, attests to the increasing compartmentalization of contemporary thought about life. There is something striking in the reality that while Martin Luther tried to broaden the understanding of vocation beyond the realm of the strictly ecclesiastical, vocation in much modern parlance relates narrowly to the economic sphere. When Luther outlined the three estates (family, church, government), there were economic aspects of each of these institutions, but no separate economic order or sphere as such. Vocation was understood to encompass and comprehend all of these spheres as well as the common order of love. Now, however, vocation is, apart from specific religious contexts where it still refers properly to ecclesiastical callings, understood to refer to economic activity. The sphere of life that was omitted from Luther's doctrines of the estates has now, in many cases, come to monopolize the doctrine of vocation.

Bonhoeffer picks up Luther's concern with understanding vocation comprehensively even as he adds the mandate of culture/work to provide a more complete picture of human society. For Luther, as Bonhoeffer writes, "Complete obedience to Jesus' commandments had to be carried out in the daily world of work."[3] Thus Bonhoeffer uses the term *vocation* in a way that is related to the more general call to Christian discipleship, but which also extends beyond the sanctified work of the Christian. The usage is not restricted to the work of the Christian life, but can refer to the pre-conversion, or secular, work of the Christian: "A Christian's secular vocation receives new recognition from the gospel only to the extent that it is carried on while following Jesus."[4] For Bonhoeffer, vocation is the calling to discipleship as manifested in the spheres of worldly life, which is

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[3] DBWE 4:48.

[4] DBWE 4:49.

often characterized in opposition to a Christian context. So Bonhoeffer observes that "every day brings the Christian many hours of being alone in an unchristian environment. These are times of *testing*. This is the proving ground of a genuine time of meditation and genuine Christian community."[5] But despite the unchristian context of a so-called "secular" vocation, we can see that Bonhoeffer's view of discipleship requires that this vocation be transformed into service and obedience to Christ. So, for instance, even work that is toilsome and troublesome can be transformed in this way: "Even routine mechanical work will be performed more patiently when it comes from the knowledge of God and God's command. Our strength and energy for work increase when we have asked God to give us the strength we need for daily work."[6]

In his earlier work *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer defined obedience primarily in terms of orientation of obedience to Christ. In it and contemporaneous works such as *Life Together*, he alludes to the various contexts in which this obedience is to be worked out, but the systematic expression of the spheres of life in which vocations occur appear in his unfinished *Ethics*. The form of the commandment of obedience to Jesus Christ is here outlined in the four mandates: family/marriage, work/culture, church, and government. These are all to be understood as "divine" mandates, and no division should be made between them as secular versus holy.[7] The mandates, called "preservation orders" in Bonhoeffer's earlier work, "are the place where the God of Jesus Christ establishes

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[5] DBWE 5:91. In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer uses military metaphors to describe this experience. See DBWE 4:48-49, where he says that Luther's rejection of monasticism "deepened the conflict between the life of Christians and the life of the world in an unforeseeable way. The Christian had closed in on the world. It was hand-to-hand combat."

[6] DBWE 5:76.

[7] DBWE 6:69.

obedience."[8]

In the sense in which *vocation* is used in its most restricted contemporary form, it would refer to the realm of activity that Bonhoeffer calls *work* or *culture*, but it is important to note that Bonhoeffer is unwilling, in accord with Luther before him, to rigidly separate out the life of the person into distinct, hermetically sealed roles. Thus these mandates are in some sense simply distinctive aspects or ways of perceiving a unified and concrete human existence. The father is at the same time a worker, a member of the church, and a citizen of the nation. Rather than understanding each one of these as separate callings, then, it is better to view them as different aspects or offices of the single calling that each Christian has received to follow Jesus Christ.

Given the crucial distinction that Bonhoeffer makes between orders of creation and orders of preservation, it is important to understand that each of these mandates has been marred by sin and the Fall, and therefore becoming orders of preservation rather than of creation. For the mandate of culture or work, this means that "cocreative human deeds" are more or less corrupted. The development of technology in the modern world, as we will explore in more detail, has threatened to become unmoored from work's proper orientation toward service of God: "The technology of the modern West has freed itself from every kind of service. Its essence is not service but mastery, mastery over nature."[9] The liberation of human beings in the modern world, especially the liberation of human reason, is seen as a repetition of the biblical Fall, in which human judgment and self-assertion were placed above simple obedience and faithfulness.

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[8] DBWE 6:358.

[9] DBWE 6:116.

But these mandates or orders of preservation are to be understood as manifestations of God's grace, despite their corruption. So the productive result of work, which is necessarily marred by the curse resulting from the Fall, is to be seen as a manifestation of God's gracious preserving action. In this way, "It is true that work is commanded, but the bread is God's free and gracious gift. We cannot simply take it for granted that our own work provides us with bread; rather this is God's order of grace."[10] Bonhoeffer validates work within the context of its fallen nature, understanding this affirmation as the graceful preserving action of God oriented toward Jesus Christ.

Work as Creative Service

Bonhoeffer's most direct and basic definition of work is "the creative service of God and Christ toward the world and of human beings toward God."[11] We see in this that human work is a secondary and derivative reality from the primary work of God. The difference this makes comes to the fore in the distinction between creation in its primary, secondary, and tertiary senses. The creation of the world by God out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) is creation its primary sense: "There is simply nothing that provides the ground for creation. Creation comes out of this nothing."[12] The subsequent shaping and ordering of the created reality is creation in a secondary sense. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, "In the creation of form the Creator denies [the Creator's own self], in that this grants form to what is created and

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[10] DBWE 5:77.

[11] DBWE 16:550.

[12] DBWE 3:33. Bonhoeffer clarifies his understanding of nothingness in distinction from panentheistic accounts of creation that make nothingness a constitutive factor of creation: "It is thus not a substance out of which, paradoxically, the world then arose, the point through which what has being had to pass. It is not a something at all, not even a negative something." See DBWE 3:34.

grants to it its own being or existence before the Creator; in that the existence of what is created serves the Creator, however, the Creator chooses to be glorified."[13] These are the two basic senses of God's "creative service," although they do not exhaust the work of God, either in preservation of the cosmos or redemption history.

Human work as "creative service" is founded upon the prior work of divine creation. It is in this sense tertiary or subsequent to God's creative service. This tertiary sense of creation becomes "co-creation," the human work of developing and making explicit the latent and implicit possibilities within the creation order. Thus work is "the concretization of a possibility."[14] As we have seen, Bonhoeffer's conception of work is illuminated by his corresponding use of the term *culture*, which refers to the cultural mandate found in Genesis 1:26-28. Thus, Bonhoeffer writes, "Humankind is to rule – though it is to rule over God's creation and to rule as having been commissioned and empowered to rule by God."[15] Similarly he writes of the outworking of this cultural mandate as a form of what is sometimes called tertiary creation (to distinguish it from God's creation *ex nihilo* and filling of the earth): "The work founded in paradise calls for cocreative human deeds. Through them a world of things and values is created that is destined for the glory and service of Jesus Christ. It is not creation out of nothing, like God's creating, but it is the creation of new things on the basis of God's initial creation."[16] This co-creative ability is an aspect of humanity that bears the image and likeness to God.

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[13] DBWE 3:39.

[14] DBWE 10:391.

[15] DBWE 3:66.

[16] DBWE 6:70.

"God gives to God's work that which makes God Lord, namely the ability to create," writes Bonhoeffer. "God calls it to life. And that God does so, and that what lives belongs to God now as something that itself creates and lives in an obedience of its own—that is the new way in which the Creator is glorified by the Creator's work. God does not will to be Lord of a dead, eternally unchangeable, subservient world; instead God wills to be Lord of life with its infinite variety of forms."[17] And just as work is founded upon the reality created and ordered by God, so too must it be oriented to him: "Through the divine mandate of work, a world should emerge that—knowingly or unknowingly—expects Christ, is directed toward Christ, is open for Christ, and serves and glorifies Christ."[18]

Placed within the context of vocation, however, work as the creative service "of human beings toward God" is in part realized through service of others. Thus work is directed outward from the individual person. It has an objective and inter-relational character. In this way "work puts human beings in the world of things," but this world of things is also where "Christians are obliged to do what they can for the welfare of their neighbors, that is, to become engaged wherever there is something to be done."[19]

The subjective aspect of work must be held in balance with this external orientation, however. Bonhoeffer affirms the character-building nature of work, and the corresponding moral and spiritual dangers of unemployment, sloth, and laziness. In "Notes for a Young Man," for instance, Bonhoeffer advises that the young man "must come to understand that we work for ourselves, not for someone else. Work is the means through

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[17] DBWE 3:57.

[18] DBWE 6:71.

[19] DBWE 5:75; DBWE 10:374.

which people make something out of themselves. Every work should basically be work on yourself."[20] This personal advice comes early in Bonhoeffer's career, during his time in Spain when he was himself still a young man. But the emphasis on the virtue of work is striking: "Work gets you through difficult hours, comforts you and calms you; work is the last thing a sinking person can cling to. Woe to those who have not learned to work; be grateful to those who taught it to you."[21]

Later Bonhoeffer would come to emphasize more strongly the need to bring spiritual maturity and insight to bear in the workplace. The intimate connection between work and prayer, for example, would help the worker to realize that it is ultimately God to whom his or her work is offered.[22] Character can be built on the job, but "even routine mechanical work will be performed more patiently when it comes from the knowledge of God and God's command. Our strength and energy for work increase when we have asked God to give us the strength we need for our daily work."[23] Work is good for Christians since "for them, work becomes a remedy for the lethargy and laziness of the flesh. The demands of the flesh die in the world of things. But that can only happen where Christians break through the It to the 'You' ['Du'] of God, who commands the work and the deed and makes them serve to liberate Christians from themselves. In this process work does not cease to be work; but the severity and rigor of labor is sought all the more by those who

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[20] DBWE 10:533.

[21] DBWE 10:533.

[22] On work and prayer, see DBWE 5:74-76.

[23] DBWE 5:76.

know what good it does them."[24]

In this way, just as in the case of marriage and family, the order of work is to be understood as a good in itself and not just as a means for pursuing some other end. The human person was created to work in accord with their created nature, originating from, defined by, and oriented towards Christ. There is evidence for this, argues Bonhoeffer, in that when we are working hard on a job that is engaging and meaningful, we become lost in the task.[25] This is the case even in the case of difficult manual labor. "Bodily life is meant for joy," writes Bonhoeffer, and we see this in that "even when it is rightly made to serve a necessary end with vigorous effort, [it] finds joy in such service."[26]

Work and Idolatry

Work is not all that human beings are created for, however, and Bonhoeffer explores the temptations that are endemic to work in this world. One of these dangers involves allowing work to assume an idolatrous place in the Christian life. There is a recurring pattern throughout biblical and world history: prosperity precedes spiritual decline.

The Sabbath sets moral and theological limits to work, which are all the more necessary given humanity's inclination to sin. The Sabbath is proclaimed in the Ten Commandments, writes Bonhoeffer, because "God knows that the work people do takes on such power over them that they cannot let it go, that they expect everything from their work

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[24] DBWE 5:75.

[25] See DBWE 5:75: "The work of the world can only be accomplished where people forget themselves, where they lose themselves in a cause, reality, the task, the It."

[26] DBWE 6:188.

and forget God in the process."[27] Any of the orders, which are good when considered in themselves, can become idolatrous when they are imbued with transcendent power. "Thus God commands that they rest from their labors," writes Bonhoeffer. "Work is not what sustains a person; God alone is. A person lives not from work but solely from God."[28] Here Bonhoeffer echoes the conclusion he had made previously in *Life Together* and *Discipleship*, in which work as an order of grace is understood as referring not to the mechanical causality of work and food, for instance, but rather to the divine benevolence illustrated in work as a means of provision. Given the fallenness of creation and the curse, humans cannot take it for granted that their labor is efficacious in itself. Thus, says Bonhoeffer, "Disciples know not only that they may not and cannot worry, but also that they need not worry. It is not worry, it is not even work which produces daily bread, but God the Father."[29]

Bonhoeffer's point here is not to denigrate work as a form of creaturely causality that God dignifies with significance and imbues with purpose. Far from it. Rather, Bonhoeffer is concerned to emphasize that work considered absolutely, apart from God's gracious ordering and providential care, cannot be viewed as a kind of autonomous or self-sufficient reality. Work is to be understood as a normally necessary but not sufficient condition for sustaining human life: "It is true that the Scripture says that 'anyone unwilling to work should not eat' (2 Thess. 3:10) and thus makes the receiving of bread strictly dependent on working for it. But the Scriptures do not say anything about any claim

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[27] DBWE 16:643.

[28] DBWE 16:643.

[29] DBWE 4:166.

that working persons have on God for their bread."[30] Bonhoeffer continues by acknowledging, "It is true that work is commanded, but the bread is God's free and gracious gift. We cannot simply take it for granted that our own work provides us with bread; rather this is God's order of grace."[31] God normally uses human work as a means of providing bread. But he is not constrained by this method. As in the case of the manna that appeared daily to the Israelites wandering in the wilderness (Ex. 16; Nu. 11:7-9), he is able to provide bread miraculously.

And just as the Israelites were to gather a double portion of manna on the day before the Sabbath, so too is a day of rest "the visible sign that a person lives from the grace of God and not from works."[32] This is grace in a double sense: First, because God deigns to preserve and provide for his creation in the midst of sin; and second, because God provides a command that directs people not to vainly seek survival only in their own powers. This would exhaust human beings in a fruitless and endless quest for something that could not be realized. In this way, Bonhoeffer is not ignorant of the practical side of the Sabbath commandment as well as its spiritual meaning: "Relaxation not only serves the purpose of increasing the capacity for work, but also provides the body with the measure of rest and joy that is due to it."[33]

Bonhoeffer had an appreciation for what an idolatrous and corrupt economic order looked like given the challenges facing Germany following from the Great War. By

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[30] DBWE 5:77.

[31] DBWE 5:77.

[32] DBWE 16:643.

[33] DBWE 6:187.

definition the orders of preservation are utterly dependent upon God for their existence and efficacy. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, "Detached from this relation, 'in themselves,' they are not divine, just as the world 'in itself' is not divine. Work 'in itself' is not divine, but work for the sake of Jesus Christ, for the sake of a divine task and goal, is divine. Only because God, for Christ's sake, has commanded human beings to work and has placed a promise on it, is work divine."[34] The mandates are to be understood as autonomous, but only in a relative sense. That is, the mandates are autonomous in relationship to one another; there is no hierarchy over or derivation from one and another of the mandates. But each mandate is directly subject and accountable to God. "Before God there is no autonomous realm; instead, the law of God revealed in Jesus Christ is the law of all earthly orders," writes Bonhoeffer. "The limits of any autonomy become apparent in the church's proclamation of the word of God. The concrete form of the divine law within the economy, the state, etc., must be discerned and identified by those who work responsibly in the business world and the state."[35]

Any of the orders could turn idolatrous when they are raised up to claim absolute autonomy. In the case of work, this happens when the connection between God's promise and the product of labor is ignored. In such a case, the acquisition of material wealth leads a people to imagine that such affluence has been achieved apart from God and on account of their own merit, and that such success can be maintained without reliance upon God.

This was, argues Bonhoeffer, essentially the state of affairs in Germany before the Great War. "Before the war we lived too far from God, we believed too much in our own

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[34] DBWE 6:69.

[35] DBWE 6:362.

power, in our allmightiness and righteousness," preached Bonhoeffer in 1930. "We attempted to be a strong and good people, but we were to proud of our endeavours, we felt too much satisfaction with our scientific, economic and social progress and we identified this progress with the coming of the Kingdom of God. We felt too happy and complacent in this world, our souls were too much at home in this world."[36] The war was a form of divine judgment, "the great disillusionment" with idolatrous pretensions: "We saw the impotence and weakness of humanity, we were suddenly awakened from our dream, we recognized our guiltiness before God and we humbled ourselves under the mighty hand of God."[37]

Economy

A great part of the humility experienced by Germany after the Great War was due to the harshness of the economic sanctions imposed as part of the peace agreement. The Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919, which formally ended the hostilities between Germany and the Allies. Article 231, known as the "war-guilt clause," assigned economic, if not moral, culpability to Germany for its aggression and responsibility for reparations. The scope of the reparations included "all damage done to the civilian population" and their property, which some estimates place in the range of 125 billion gold marks. As Alan Sharp writes, this aspect of the treaty "was a classic case of something that seemed to be a good idea at the time, meeting, temporarily, the pressing political needs of the European leaders; but its longer term consequences were neither expected nor welcome."[38] How

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[36] DBWE 10:582.

[37] DBWE 10:582.

[38] Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking After the First World War,*

much of the blame for Germany's economic troubles in the following decades is to be attributed to the policymakers of various national interests has been debated for the better part of a century following. But the economic reality in Germany following the Great War was that, as Niall Ferguson has written, "paying reparations meant printing paper marks."[39] The resulting inflation weakened the German economy and led to decades of economic and social turmoil leading up to the outbreak of the next war.

The basic dilemma facing the peacemakers at Versailles, as Gerald D. Feldman observes, was articulated by J.P. Morgan at the time: a Germany strong enough to make reparations would be economically strong enough to be dangerous. But a Germany too economically weak to be dangerous would also be too weak to make sufficient reparations.[40] Whatever the intentions of the settlement and the various negotiations following, the result was a Germany weak enough to foster continued enmity but strong enough to imperil the entire world.

As Bonhoeffer reflected on the situation in 1930, he saw an interrelated complex of moral, spiritual, and economic problems facing the German people. "Anyone with open eyes can easily see in our faces that we are a people with a heavy, frightful burden on our backs, a people that takes its steps forward only slowly and with great effort," he said. "There is one slogan and one only: Work. And again: Work unless you want you or your

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1919-1923, 2d ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 91.

[39] Niall Ferguson, "The Balance of Payments Question: Versailles and After," in *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years*, ed. Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman, and Elisabeth Glaser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 429. On the consequences of this policy, see Frederick Taylor, *The Downfall of Money: Germany's Hyperinflation and the Destruction of the Middle Class* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[40] See Gerald D. Feldman, "A Comment," in *The Treaty of Versailles*, 444-445.

children to fall on bad times. Such knowledge oppresses a person, turns work into a curse and life into care and anxiety."[41] Much of this burden was a result of the economic consequences of the war: "The debts of the war press us not only in regard to our financial standard but likewise in regard to our whole behaviour, we see the hopelessness of our work; it is impossible for us to provide social and economic conditions for our children in the future, in which we can trust for security."[42]

Bonhoeffer never formally studied economics to any significant extent, although he does relate in a letter to his friend Erwin Sutz in 1931 that he was "studying up energetically on economics" and "reading several really interesting and simple books about it."[43] The following year Bonhoeffer also addressed a "working group" of theologians and economists, discussing his conception of the "orders of preservation" on multiple occasions.[44] So while Bonhoeffer may have had some rudimentary familiarity with economics, his interests in the subject were related to his ethical deliberations, and his engagement with questions of political economy would become even more pressing during his period of involvement with the *Abwehr* conspiracy during World War II.

The conspirators had plans to institute a new government after the successful coup against Hitler, and this involved both attempting to negotiate as much as possible a

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[41] DBWE 10:573. See also Bonhoeffer's assessment of publications on international unemployment and social insurance in DBWE 10:437-438.

[42] DBWE 10:583. As lecture notes relate elsewhere, "The great social decisions of the time forced people to reconsider. They saw that an economy operating by autonomous laws had produced terrible consequences, for the autonomous law of the economy is basically always the self-will of a social class." See DBWE 11:220.

[43] DBWE 11:36.

[44] DBWE 11:90.

peaceful settlement to the conflict with the Allies ahead of time as well as to make plans for domestic policy, or as it was described in one of the indictments against the conspirators, "the economic, social, and cultural-political reorganization of the Reich."[45] Involved in the larger circle of planning for a post-war Germany was a group focused on "economic questions," including Walter Eucken (1891-1950), Constantin von Dietze (1891-1973, whose indictment on April 9, 1945 was cited above), Walter Bauer (1901-1968), and Friedrich Karrenberg (1904-1966).[46]

Even though he was not directly involved in any of the aspects of the discussions surrounding economic questions, Bonhoeffer was thus at least loosely affiliated with thinkers involved in the so-called *Freiburger Kreis* (Freiburg Circle), lending his name and helping to organize them, even if his input was not direct into some of the constitutive groups.[47] As Helmut Thielicke (1908-1986) notes in the introduction to a collection of the working group's report, this was in many ways unprecedented territory for these Protestant thinkers, who did not have the resources of Roman Catholicism (social and political-ethical tradition, natural-law teaching, and papal encyclicals).[48] It is at least plausible, therefore, to posit some potential continuity between Bonhoeffer and his program in *Ethics* and the broad strokes of the successful post-war policy engineered by the ordoliberal school, associated with thinkers like Eucken, Franz Böhm (1895-1977), Alexander Rüstow

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[45] DBWE 16:467.

[46] DBWE 16:361. Also included was a "permanent working group on natural law," in which Dietze was also a principal. See DBWE 16:364.

[47] See *In der Stunde Null: Die Denkschrift des Freiburger »Bonhoeffer-Kreises«* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1979). See also Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 303.

[48] Helmut Thielicke, "Zur Einführung," in *In der Stunde Null*, 12.

(1885-1963), and Wilhelm Röpke (1899-1966).[49]

As for Bonhoeffer's own economic thought, we have seen how he emphasized the *relative* autonomy of the various spheres. For one sphere, such as the ecclesiastical, to attempt to determine how another, such as the economic, ought to operate in its own realm would be tyrannical. That is not to say that Christianity or Christian moral theology has nothing to say about economic life, but it means that the institutional church does not stand over the economic sphere to direct its course or provide specific instruction. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, "For the sake of Christ and on the strength of Christ there exist and should exist worldly order in state, family, economy. For the sake of Christ the worldly order stands under the commandment of God. Here one should note that this is not a matter of a 'Christian state' or 'Christian economy,' but rather of the just state, the just economy as a worldly order for the sake of Christ. Thus there is a Christian responsibility for the worldly orders, and there are assertions within a Christian ethic that refer to this responsibility."[50]

In this way, the economic mandate and "economic life" is like other orders, that "are not cultivated by government itself, but they are subject to its supervision and, within certain limits (not to be further specified here), to its control. But at no time does government become the subject of these spheres of work."[51] Bonhoeffer can hardly be

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[49] See generally Ştefan Sorin Mureşan, *Social Market Economy: The Case of Germany* (Dordtrecht: Springer, 2014), especially 60-62; and Viktor J. Vanberg, "The Freiburg school of law and economics: Predecessor of constitutional economics," in idem, *The Constitution of Markets: Essays in Political Economy* (New York: Routlege, 2001), 37-51. See also Traugott Roser, *Protestantismus und soziale Marktwirtschaft: Eine Studie am Beispiel Franz Böhms* (Münster: Lit, 1998). For Röpke, see Samuel Gregg, *Wilhelm Röpke's Political Economy* (Northampton: Elgar, 2010).

[50] DBWE 16:543.

[51] DBWE 16:520.

blamed in such an unfinished work composed amidst such a trying time for not specifying the details of the ordering and supervising power that the government ought to exercise with respect to things like economics, science, and art. Perhaps some of those details are present in the deliberations of the Freiburg Circle, and Bonhoeffer may have been willing to accede to some degree to the expertise of his collaborators.[52] There may well be strong resonance here between the ordoliberal perspective, which emphasizes a formal and juridical ordering power for government with respect to economic affairs, oriented at maintaining healthy competition and checking monopoly power, and Bonhoeffer's own disposition. As he had outlined the dangers, a "legitimate earthly order" had been "until recently... threatened by liberal anarchy in all spheres of life. Today it is threatened by the omnipotence of the state (it could next be threatened by economic omnipotence). This omnipotence of the state must be broken in the name of a legitimate order that submits to the command of God."[53] Ordoliberalism similarly defined itself against a corrupted form of *laissez-faire* liberalism and collectivism, while still favoring the ordering principle of freedom rather than coercion.[54]

That Bonhoeffer was concerned about individual liberty, understood socially rather than atomistically, is indisputable. Thus he complains against social orders in which slavery exists in fact if not in name. Enslavement, says Bonhoeffer, "exists wherever a person has become a thing under the power of another and is only a means to another

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[52] Bonhoeffer also referred to government "supervision" and "certain limits—later to be described—to governmental direction" elsewhere. See DBWE 6:72.

[53] DBWE 16:531.

[54] See, for instance, Wilhelm Röpke, *The Moral Foundations of Civil Society*, trans. Cyril Spencer Fox (Brunswick: Transaction, 2002), 48-49.

person's ends. There is always a danger of this when people do not have the freedom to choose their place of work, when they cannot exchange their place of work for another, or when they cannot control the amount of their labor."[55]

The social embeddedness of Bonhoeffer's conception of the human person comes through particularly in his doctrine of vicarious representative action, which has intriguing possibilities for application to economic problems. The problem of proximity in social ethics has a rich history in Christianity, going back to the question asked of Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29).[56] In the globalized world of today, with technological advances in communications, a population of more than 6.9 billion people, and global trade of goods and services that in 2013 exceeded US$ 25 trillion, the opportunities for meaningful interaction and exposure to other people the world over is unprecedented in human history. The World Trade Organization's (WTO) *World Trade Report 2014* highlights "the rise of global value chains" (GVCs) as a particularly noteworthy phenomenon over the last two decades, a trend that "has resulted from technological innovations in communication and transportation, which have lowered coordination costs, allowing countries to specialize in production of specific tasks or components, rather than entire final products."[57]

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[55] DBWE 16:215.

[56] On the problem of proximity in connection with natural law and subsidiarity touching on Augustine and Aquinas in relation to the Reformed orthodox, see Jordan J. Ballor, "A Society of Mutual Aid: Natural Law and Subsidiarity in Early Modern Reformed Perspective," in *Law and Religion: The Legal Teachings of the Catholic and Protestant Reformations*, ed. Wim Decock, Jordan J. Ballor, Michael Germann, and Laurent Waelkens (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 9-21.

[57] World Trade Organization, *World Trade Report 2014: Trade and development: recent trends and the role of the WTO* (Geneva: World Trade Organization, 2014), 78.

At the same time, with increased connectivity there are legitimate concerns about increasing social fragmentation and dislocation. From the perspective of the developed world, even where it is technically feasible to conduct ethical audits of supply and "global value" chains, which is not always the case, there is often a lack of concern about or recognition of the deep interrelatedness of societies from around the world and the corresponding moral responsibility.[58] As Walter Schweidler puts it, "There is an *ordo amoris* through which each human being sees himself placed in a culturally and socially constituted order of closeness, and he must comprehend from this to whom he is responsible primarily and to a greater degree than others."[59]

Bonhoeffer's development of the doctrine of vocation into the specific formulation of vicarious representative action holds the potential to transform the way in which we approach our relationships, including those in the economic realm. As Bonhoeffer writes, "Responsibility is based on vicarious representative action [Stellvertretung]. This is most evident in those relationships in which a person is literally required to act on behalf of others, for example, as a father, as a statesman, or as the instructor of an apprentice."[60] We might easily apply this to even the most mundane of commercial transactions as well. So, while "a father acts on behalf of his children by working, providing, intervening, struggling, and suffering for them" and "in so doing, he really stands in their place," a server at a restaurant represents in personal form the kitchen staff, the custodial workers,

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[58] See, for instance, the variety of concerns raised in Daniel K. Finn, ed., *Distant Markets, Distant Harms: Economic Complicity and Christian Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[59] Walter Schweidler, "A Better Life: On the Economic Dimension of Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 104.

[60] DBWE 6:257.

and the managerial authorities of the establishment.[61] At a greater distance but in some real sense no less significantly, the server also represents the participants in the "global value chain" that were involved in the production and transport of the elements that went into meal.

The recognition of the reality of these diverse and far flung relationships, the cooperation and coordination that had to go into something as mundane as a meal at a restaurant, should imbue our interactions with a deep sense of wonder and gratitude. The server can easily understand, for instance, how his or her comportment might reflect on colleagues. Understanding that he or she represents, in some way, the interests of the chef, for example, should help in providing a sense of context and perspective that is often missing in specialized work. With this representational activity there comes a corresponding moral responsibility. For the customer, the server becomes not just an impersonal entity, but a moral agent who comes bearing (common) grace. In this way, the server "is not an isolated individual, but incorporates the selves of several people in his own self."[62] The proper response to such offerings is gratitude, and so the recognition of the representational responsibility, the vicarious representative action, of people in their daily activities and occupations, has the potential to transform the nature of even extended and disparate global value and supply chains. This way of thinking may take some imagination, but it is a deeply *moral* exercise of imagination that provides a rich texture and significance to daily activities. Thus Bonhoeffer concludes, "Even the commandment to love the neighbor therefore does not mean a legalistic restriction of my responsibility to

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[61] DBWE 6:257-258.

[62] DBWE 6:258.

the neighbor whom I encounter while sharing the same place, citizenship, profession, or family. The neighbor can be met precisely in the one who is farthest away, and vice versa."[63] And even when the faraway neighbor is not met directly, the can be met indirectly through the vicarious representative action of those in our proximity.

Technology

As alluded to earlier, the technological advances that connect us in so many concrete ways also threaten to isolate us in more subtle and often insidious ways. The reality of the fall is such that the human person, created in God's image to be productively and creatively serving of others, makes things in his own fallen image. The person who has chosen to be "like God" makes things that are like him in some deep sense. This is true not only for human procreation (see Gen. 5:3) but also human co-creation. And perhaps the most defining co-creative feature of the contemporary world is the successful application of technical human reason to the natural world and social order. For all his difficulties in understanding the relationship between doctrine and life, Max Weber (1864-1920) was correct in identifying the defining characteristic of modern economic activity relative to earlier eras as "rational organization."[64] In the scientific realm it was what Paul Tillich (1886-1965) called "observing and calculating reason."[65] The applications of this kind of technical reason to problems of economy and science have combined to create

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[63] DBWE 6:295.

[64] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 1992), xxxv.

[65] Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 62.

technological innovations and phenomena at an unprecedented, and seemingly increasing, rate.[66]

Bonhoeffer traced the backgrounds of this modern form of reason to the Enlightenment, and specifically the French Revolution, a posture that he elsewhere identifies as modern "humanism."[67] This new development was what he called the "liberated ratio," which led to "the discovery of that mysterious correspondence between the laws of thought and the laws of nature. Ratio became a working hypothesis, a heuristic principle, and thus led to the incomparable rise of technology. This was something fundamentally new in world history."[68]

The result is a phenomenon that is aimed at absolute mastery and autonomy rather than obedient service: "The technology of the modern West has freed itself from every kind of service. Its essence is not service but mastery, mastery over nature. A wholly new spirit has produced it, the spirit of violent subjection of nature to thinking and experimenting human beings; and when this spirit dies out, it will come to an end."[69] The challenge for Bonhoeffer, which he grappled with until the end, was to recognize the corrupted and fallen aspects of human nature and its creations without abandoning the authentic developments to perdition. So while Bonhoeffer observes that "technology has

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[66] Although one might argue that nuclear technology is the most significant development since Bonhoeffer's time, a more pervasive and fundamental example might be the integrated circuit. For the theory of technological development popularized by Gordon E. Moore, see David C. Brock, ed., *Understanding Moore's Law: Four Decades of Innovation* (Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation, 2005).

[67] DBWE 6:122.

[68] DBWE 6:116.

[69] DBWE 6:116.

become an end in itself. It has its own soul; its symbol is the machine, the embodiment of violation and exploitation of nature," he also concludes that "a naive faith understandably turns in protest against this modern technology. It senses therein a human hubris that would build a world counter to the one God created, and sees in a technology that conquers time and space an enterprise that defies God."[70] On this perspective, "The benefits of technology pale beside its demonic powers."[71]

The difficulty is, however, that in terms of technology as well as in philosophy, history cannot be undone. So while the theologian and the philosopher now exist in a post-Kantian "world come of age,"[72] the worker and the scientist live in an era of "the triumph of technology. The technological age is a true heritage of our Western history, with which we must grapple, and which we cannot reverse."[73]

The essence of the answer, if not the concrete application, is recognizing the basic danger inherent in this kind of "liberated ratio," which knows and respects no boundaries. Our technical reach has exceeded, or slipped beyond, our moral grasp. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, "the desire for absolute freedom leads people into deepest servitude. The master of the machine becomes its slave; the machine becomes an enemy of the human being. What is created turns against its creator—a strange repetition of the biblical fall!"[74] It is not the case that we must simply seek to bring technology back into a place of obedient

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[70] DBWE 6:116.

[71] DBWE 6:116.

[72] DBWE 8:450, 478-479.

[73] DBWE 6:117.

[74] DBWE 6:122.

service. Where this is possible, it must be done. But increasingly it seems that such reining in of technology by moral forces is unlikely or unfeasible. For Bonhoeffer, one implication of this undeniable mastery of human beings over nature was that the gospel must meet humanity in its apparent strength rather than it its weakness. The gospel must be a message addressed to a people that sees no technical or moral limits to its power. “Nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them” (Gen. 11:6).

CHAPTER 6

CHURCH

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology has rightly been understood as Christocentric, in that his Christology provides a starting point for his doctrinal work. But Bonhoeffer's work might also be understood as ecclesiocentric, which in part is due to the close connection between Christ and the church in Bonhoeffer's thought. Bonhoeffer thus defined the church as "Christ existing as church-community."[1] The priority of the church in Bonhoeffer's thought comes to expression in his observation that "In order to establish clarity about the inner logic of theological construction, it would be good for once if a presentation of doctrinal theology were to start not with the doctrine of God but with the doctrine of the church."[2]

We have seen that the concept of vicarious representative action is central to Bonhoeffer's ethical thought, and it is in his earliest work on the church, *Sanctorum Communio*, that he first introduces the concept of *Stellvertretung*. *Sanctorum Communio* was Bonhoeffer's earliest complete academic work, a dissertation completed in 1927 at the University of Berlin under the supervision of Reinhold Seeberg. It is a bold attempt, as Bonhoeffer's friend and biographer Eberhard Bethge writes, "to bring sociology and the critical tradition into harmony with the theology of revelation, that is, to reconcile

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[1] DBWE 1:141.

[2] DBWE 1:134. See also the student notes from a lecture course Bonhoeffer delivered during the summer semester of 1932 on "The Nature of the Church" in DBWE 11:269-332.

Troeltsch and Barth."[3] *Sanctorum Communio* offers important insights into the theological and philosophical contexts, the terminology, and the thematic commitments that would characterize Bonhoeffer's entire theological career.[4] Thus we are introduced to Bonhoeffer's theological and ethical emphasis on "vicarious representative action" (*Stellvertretung*), which as Clifford Green rightly notes, is Bonhoeffer's "central Christological concept and has far-reaching anthropological significance."[5]

Bonhoeffer's aim is to come to a truly Christian understanding of social life, and in this way he takes his point of departure in the social structure of the church, which is "conceivable only in the sphere of reality established by God; this means it cannot be deduced. *The reality of the church is a reality of revelation, a reality that essentially must be* either believed or denied."[6] This revelation is at its most central point Christological, "Christ existing as church-community."[7] The reason for the necessity of this ecclesial

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[3] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. ed., trans. Eric Mosbacher, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 83. Broadly on the debates between Barth and the liberal theologians in Berlin and elsewhere, see G. C. Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology: Movements and Motives* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 39-74.

[4] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 84. *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* provide critically important insight into the formative theological and intellectual contexts for Bonhoeffer's work. See also more broadly Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 23-25, 76-83. See also Joachim von Soosten, "Editor's Afterword to the German Edition" in DBWE 1:305: "Bonhoeffer's theology continuously revolves around a core of questions that have already been raised in his first major theological work. The tension that was already present in *Sanctorum Communio* was maintained until the end. In his letters from prison, Bonhoeffer describes himself as a 'modern theologian who still carries within himself the legacy of liberal theology.' The debate with Karl Barth also is continued in these letters."

[5] See Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 56.

[6] DBWE 1:127: "We do not want to employ external criteria for judging the church. Rather, the church can be understood fully only from within, on the basis of its own claim; only on this basis can we develop appropriate criteria for judging it."

[7] DBWE 1:141. See also Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 27: "The ultimate criterion is the revelation in Christ."

starting point is that all natural human social structures are essentially corrupt in the fallen world. In drawing a distinction between his approach and that of idealism, Bonhoeffer writes that "the doctrine of the primal state is significant precisely because it enables us to grasp concretely the reality of sin, which infinitely alters the essence of things." For Bonhoeffer, the doctrine of creation as such, unfallen creation, the primal state, functions as a limiting concept. Sin has radically altered both the individual human person and social realities. It is vain to attempt to speculatively come to know what unfallen and uncorrupt human reality was like before the Fall. Rather, because "all natural forms of community remain, but they are corrupt in their inmost core," the starting point for a true sociological understanding must be that form of community brought into existence precisely for the purpose of redemption (i.e., the church).[8] The church is a "completely novel sociological structure."[9]

It is this structure that forms the basis for sociological and socio-theological analysis. Bonhoeffer writes of the relationship between fallen humanity and the redeemed church: "It is not the case that the concept of the sanctorum communio would make everything that has been said about the peccatorum communio [community of sinners] irrelevant; rather, it is precisely at this point that the meaning of the peccatorum communio first becomes relevant."[10] By this Bonhoeffer means that from the perspective of the church and redemption the natural, broken, and sinful humanity truly finds its proper point of reference. We only really know what sinful humanity is from the perspective of Christ

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[8] DBWE 1:108.

[9] DBWE 1:177.

[10] DBWE 1:123.

and his redemptive work.

In this sense Bonhoeffer's conception of the natural order present in the fallen world is normatively governed by special revelation. It is not the case that we build up out of natural, rational, or philosophical resources a fundamental theology to which special revelation is added. Instead, special revelation retrospectively provides meaning and insight into the reality of the natural and fallen order. The two go together in this way. Using a corporeal image, Bonhoeffer writes, "The human body–the corpus Adae–has to be broken, in order for the body of the resurrection–the corpus Christi–to be created. The history of Jesus Christ, however, is closed to us without his word. Only if we take both together will it be possible to read the past and the future of humanity in Christ's history."[11] So just as the "doctrine of the primal state is hope projected backward" for Bonhoeffer, we might also say the doctrine of the natural order is divine providence projected backward from the perspective of redemption.[12]

With this basic theological method in place, moving from special revelation to the natural order, Bonhoeffer's doctrine of vicarious representative action gains added significance. For *Stellvertretung*, introduced here in *Sanctorum Communio*, becomes the central anthropological concept that distinguishes fallen from renewed humanity. The doctrine of vicarious representative action moves from its exemplification in the person of Jesus Christ as head of the church-community to the application to its individual members through the work of the Holy Spirit. Green summarizes the distinction between humankind in Christ and in Adam in this way: "For Bonhoeffer, Christ the Stellvertreter is the *initiator*

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[11] DBWE 1:147.

[12] DBWE 1:61.

and *reality* of the new humanity. The person and action of Christ is ‘vicarious’ in that he does for human beings what they cannot possibly do for themselves. Herein lies his distinctive difference, as Kollektivperson, from Adam; every member of humanity sins in the same way as Adam, but only Christ overcomes the ‘broken community’ of sin.”[13] Christ’s vicarious representative action is the “Christological foundation” for which “the anthropological corollary is obvious: ‘Stellvertretung is the life-principle of the new humanity.’”[14]

This “life-principle” is applied to the new humanity through the work of the Holy Spirit. For the “actualization” of the new humanity in Christ “is accomplished by the spirit of Christ and by the Holy Spirit. What the former is for the church as a whole, the latter is for the individual.”[15] The close linkage here between the corporate work of the spirit of Christ and the individual work of the Holy Spirit speaks to the importance of the church as a unique sociological structure for Bonhoeffer. It is in the church where Christ is corporeally and spiritually present and where he is to be sought. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, “As Christ and the new humanity now necessarily belong together, so the Holy Spirit must

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[13] Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 56. For the notion of *Kollektivperson*, see DBWE 1:77, 105: “If the equal weight of social and personal being is to be maintained, what is the meaning of community as a metaphysical unit in relation to the individual person? *We maintain that community can be interpreted as a collective person with the same structure as the individual person*”; “The collective person is metaphysically autonomous in relation to the individuals, though at the same time genetically dependent.” See also Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 36-45. Green points to Hegel and idealism as the proximate background for Bonhoeffer’s expressions here, but for an Aristotelian reading of Kant’s prototype of perfect humanity that coheres well with Green’s explication of Bonhoeffer’s doctrine of *Kollektivperson*, see Chris L. Firestone and Nathan Jacobs, *In Defense of Kant’s* Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 155-169.

[14] Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, 56. See DBWE 1:147.

[15] DBWE 1:139.

be understood as being at work only in this new humanity. It is evidently a mistake, therefore, to attempt to reflect on the objective work of the Holy Spirit independently of the church-community. The Spirit is only in the church-community, and the church-community is only in the Spirit."[16] We are to seek Christ where he has determined himself to be found: as the head and savior of the new humanity. And where Christ is found in the church the Holy Spirit binds the members together in community. "The Holy Spirit is the will of God that gathers individuals together to be the church-community, maintains it, and is at work only within it," writes Bonhoeffer. "We experience our election only in the church-community, which is already established by Christ, by personally appropriating it through the Holy Spirit, by standing in the actualized church."[17]

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the basic ethical imperative for Christians is to embody this vicarious representative action in their social relationships. The reality here for the Christian is that "my service to the other person springs from the life-principle of vicarious representative action."[18] This service, governed by *Stellvertretung*, manifests itself in the idea of "being-for-each-other," just as Christ is "for us." Bonhoeffer writes that "active being-for-each-other has two defining aspects: Christ is the measure and standard of our conduct (John 13:15, 34f.; 1 John 3:10); and our actions are the actions of members of the body of Christ, that is, they possess the power of the love of Christ, through which each may and ought to become a Christ to the other (1 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 12:4ff.; Eph. 4:4,

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[16] DBWE 1:144.

[17] DBWE 1:143.

[18] DBWE 1:147.

12ff.; Col. 3:15)."[19]

These two formulations, the church-community as the fundamental sociological reality and vicarious representative action as the life-principle of renewed humanity, underscore the basic Christological primacy of Bonhoeffer's theological approach.[20] It is in Christ that we are transformed and that we realize who we are as individuals, in relation to one another, and to God. If Christ is the "measure and standard of our conduct" as Christians, then he is also the norm by which we can judge the reality of fallen humanity. From this standpoint, sinful humankind stands incapable of truly acting vicariously.

This is the basic difference between Christ and Adam, between the new and the old humanity, "For Adam is 'representative human being' ['der Mensch'], but Christ is the Lord of his new humanity."[21] In this way, writes Bonhoeffer, "everyone becomes guilty by their own strength and fault, because they themselves are Adam; each person, however, is reconciled apart from their own strength and merit, because they themselves are not Christ."[22] The "fundamental difference between Adam and Christ" is "*the function of vicarious representative*," in which "Adam does not intentionally act as vicarious representative; on the contrary, Adam's action is extremely egocentric." Adam is "representative" in that he is the representative head of each of us who "become guilty" by

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[19] DBWE 1:183. On the emphasis on the love of neighbor in contrast to Barth, see Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 22-24.

[20] See Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 22: "Thus, whenever Barth's assertion of God's free majesty, or his insistence that God is at no one's disposal, threatened and volatized a due emphasis on the earthly concreteness and affectedness (*DBE*, 53), Bonhoeffer raised critical 'questions.' In other words, Bonhoeffer protested wherever he thought Barth too was neglecting Christology."

[21] DBWE 1:146.

[22] DBWE 1:146.

our own "strength and fault," for "in the old humanity the whole of humanity falls anew, so to speak with every person who sins." But in Christ, who acts intentionally for us as vicarious representative, "humanity has been brought once and for all—this is essential to *real* vicarious representative action [Stellvertretung]—into community with God."[23]

In this way a significant feature of *Sanctorum Communio* for the understanding of Bonhoeffer's Christologically-focused ethics is in the concept of vicarious representative action, which can be understood as a particular expression of the larger retrospective method, from Christ to Adam, church to fallen humanity, evident in *Sanctorum Communio*. It is on the basis of our understanding of vicarious representative action that we can fully identify the fundamentally different character of the action of fallen humanity. The two differ in kind, and the latter is normatively defined in relationship to the former: "Christ's history is marked by the fact that in it humanity-in-Adam is transformed into humanity-in-Christ."[24] Christ transforms nature, or perhaps even more properly, Christ consummates creation.

Church and Society

There is a sense in which the church as an institution is, like the state, a secondary or remedial reality given the Fall. The church "embraces all people as they live within all the other mandates. Since a person is at the same time worker, spouse, and citizen, since one mandate overlaps with the others, and since all the mandates need to be fulfilled at the same

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[23] DBWE 1:146.

[24] DBWE 1:147.

time, so the church mandate reaches into all the other mandates."[25] Bonhoeffer identifies the core responsibilities for each mandate with the idea of offices, so that the church, on the other hand, has the office of proclamation of the gospel. This office represents the primary and core responsibility, so that all attendant responsibilities are secondary and must be related to the core duty. The basic way that the church relates to the broader society, then, is through its proclamation of the gospel to its hearers who occupy unique positions of responsibility (callings) within the world.

The church thus constantly proclaims the unity of the two tables to the society as well as particularly toward the government, so that the true divine basis for governmental authority is made known. He writes, "It is never the task of the church to preach to the state the message of the natural instinct for self-preservation, but only obedience toward what is owed to God. These are two different messages. The proclamation of the church to the world can always only be Jesus Christ in both law and gospel. The second table cannot be separated from the first."[26]

Bonhoeffer affirms then some sort of separation between church and state, in that each has its own divine mandate and responsibility. It is not the task of the church, for instance, to use coercive force in service of the gospel: "If persons in government are Christian, then they must know that Christian proclamation occurs not by the sword but by the word."[27] Indeed, he writes, "the concept of the Christian state is from this perspective untenable, for the governmental character of the state is independent of the

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[25] DBWE 6:73

[26] DBWE 6:359-60.

[27] DBWE 16:524.

Christian character of persons in government. Government exists also among non-Christians."[28]"

The church, however, understood in its institutional form, has a prophetic responsibility to the broader society. Bonhoeffer says,

> Part of the church's role as guardian is to call sin by name and to warn human beings of sin; for "Righteousness exalts a nation [that is, temporally and eternally], but sin is a reproach to any people [that is, a temporal and eternal reproach]" (Prov. 14:34). If the church did not do that, then it would itself become implicated with the blood of the ungodly (Ezek. 3:17ff.). This warning against sin extends quite publicly to the church-community, and those who will not hear it bring judgment upon themselves.[29]

Again, the church has the duty to prophetically proclaim both tables of the Decalogue, so that the basis of the government in the divinely instituted mandate and the content of the government's responsibility in the second table are fully made known.

This is consistent with the framework of interaction between church and state that Bonhoeffer had laid out much earlier in April, 1933. In addressing the propriety of the imposition of the Aryan clauses by the Nazi state on the German church, Bonhoeffer explores "There are thus three possibilities for action that the church can take vis-à-vis the state"[30] The first task of the church is "questioning the state as to the legitimate state character of its actions, that is, making the state responsible for what it does."[31] In the second place, the church is responsible to provide "service to the victims of the state's actions. The church has an unconditional obligation toward the victims of any societal

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[28] DBWE 16:510.

[29] DBWE 16:524.

[30] DBWE 12:365.

[31] DBWE 12:365.

order, even if they do not belong to the Christian community."[32] These first two types of action are common for the church, since every manifestation of government will be imperfect and result in some form of injustice—"The poor you will always have with you" (Matt. 26:11). The third type of church action is the rarest and the most serious, because it involves action "not just to bind up the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel but to seize the wheel itself. Such an action would be direct political action on the part of the church. This is only possible and called for if the church sees the state to be failing in its function of creating law and order."[33]

Direct political action by the church can only come when the church is *in statu confessionis* and where "the state would find itself in the act of self-negation."[34] The purpose of the political action would be only to restore the state to its rightful purpose, to "to protect the state from itself and to preserve it."[35] In this sense such action is an "ultimate recognition of the state" even as it is aimed at undermining the state's particular agenda.[36] Because this third type of action is exceptional and extreme, Bonhoeffer viewed it as the responsibility of an "evangelical council" to determine the existence of a confessional cause.[37]

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[32] DBWE 12:365.

[33] DBWE 12:365-366.

[34] DBWE 12:366.

[35] DBWE 12:366.

[36] DBWE 12:366.

[37] DBWE 12:367. I examine the exchange between Barth and Bonhoeffer on the issue of the application of the Aryan paragraph to the churches in "The Aryan Clause, the Confessing Church, and the Ecumenical Movement: Barth and Bonhoeffer on Natural Theology, 1933–1935," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59, no. 3 (August 2006): 263-80.

More typically, however, such direct and concrete moral engagement with the state is to be pursued by other institutions of civil society, in many cases those made up of Christians and even including explicitly Christian aims. These, however, are distinct from the church in its formal institutional identity. So on the one hand Bonhoeffer defines but also delimits the form of the institutional church's engagement with government, even while he affirms the vital place of voluntary associations and organizations to the moral health of the society.

This division is how Bonhoeffer aims to protect the unique responsibility of the institutional church to proclaim the gospel even while he affirms the relative independence and autonomy of the government as an order of preserving grace. He provides a typical distinction "between the responsibility of the pastoral office and the responsibility of Christians."[38] Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, "There is no doubt that the church of the Reformation is not encouraged to get involved directly in specific political actions of the state. The church has neither to praise nor to censure the laws of the state. Instead, it has to affirm the state as God's order of preservation [Erhaltungsordnung] in this godless world."[39] Likewise "the true church of Christ, which lives by the gospel alone and knows the nature of state actions, will never interfere in the functioning of the state in this way, by criticizing its history-making actions from the standpoint of any sort of, say, humanitarian ideal."[40]

In making this distinction between the formal, institutional responsibilities of the

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[38] DBWE 16:524.

[39] DBWE 12:362.

[40] DBWE 12:363.

office-bearers of the church and the moral responsibilities of laypersons in their individual callings, Bonhoeffer aims to protect not only the state from ecclesiastical dominance, but also the prudential judgments of laypeople. “It remains for the humanitarian associations and individual Christian men who see themselves called to do so, to make the state aware of the moral aspect of the measures it takes in this regard, that is, should the occasion arise, to accuse the state of offenses against morality,” writes Bonhoeffer. “Every strong state needs such associations and such individual personages and will foster them with a certain amount of reserved encouragement. Insight into the finer art of statecraft will tell the state how to make use of this advice in a relative sense.”[41] We can think here of societies organized for direct political action or lobbying as well as more general associations for the promotion of moral goods, including friendship, charity, and civic responsibility.

We can also see at work here Bonhoeffer’s increasing discomfort with the place of the church in the evangelical Protestant continental tradition. The establishment of churches by government authority is fraught with all kinds of dangers, and some of these could be observed in the behavior of the churches in Germany leading up to and throughout the two World Wars. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, “A church that is regarded essentially as a cultural function of the state will interfere in the work of the state with advice of this kind, and all the more wherever the state incorporates the church more substantially, that is, by relegating essentially moral and educational duties to it.”[42] Throughout the church struggle Bonhoeffer was variously attracted to and exasperated by the possibilities and challenges

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[41] DBWE 12:363.

[42] DBWE 12:363.

represented by a free-church ecclesiology.[43] But the free-church model raised questions not only for the relationship of the church to the state and broader society, but also for the relationship of churches to one another.

Ecumenism

As the church struggle developed and the challenge represented by the German Christian party in the church became clearer, the question of church identity and unity came to the fore. For many Christians, the challenge represented by the Nazis essentially remained focused on the church as a battleground for the broader policy of centralization or "coordination" (*Gleichshaltung*).[44] As Eric Voegelin has written, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of the few leaders of the confessing movement within the church that from the outset had explicit concern beyond the borders of the institutional church. Thus, said Voegelin, "Here you have this pattern of social behavior. As long as the neighbor gets it in the neck, we all happily join in, but as soon as our own turn comes, then there is resistance. But by that time it is a bit too late, and naturally the basic rules of humanity were not available when the other was being massacred."[45] Later he writes that Bonhoeffer is one of the "genuine victims of resistance; but what is usually called resistance is a resistance apropos

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[43] In this regard, see especially Bonhoeffer's essay on "Protestantism without Reformation," reflecting on the unique church-state-society matrix in the United States in DBWE 15:437-462.

[44] For this process throughout German society, see Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 386-407.

[45] Eric Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, trans. Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 165.

of the threat to people's own social, material or institutional interests."[46] In this way Bonhoeffer was deeply worried about the vitality of civil social institutions as well as the faithfulness of the church under the coercion of the Third Reich.

As a theologian and a pastor, however, Bonhoeffer was deeply engaged in the church struggle even if his resistance to the Nazis was not constrained to the ecclesiastical realm. A key element of the early opposition to the Nazification of the German church was the Barmen Declaration, written by Karl Barth, which contested the corruption of Christian doctrine by the neo-pagan ideology of "blood and soil" (*Blut und Boden*). Although, as I have argued, Barth and Bonhoeffer disagreed in their respective understandings of the relationship between the Barmen Declaration, natural theology, and the Aryan paragraph, the confessional statement was a touchstone for Bonhoeffer in his work with the Confessing Church.[47]

In a "Draft Proposal for a Reorganization of the Church after the 'End of the Church Struggle,'" which Bonhoeffer developed in collaboration with Friedrich Justus Perels (1910-1945) as part of the plans for post-war reorganization, Bonhoeffer asserted the need for the state "to lift the limitations on the freedom of the church that have existed since 1933 and to grant it in proclamation and order an autonomy corresponding to its nature."[48] While the reorganized Protestant church in Germany would not be entirely independent and free-standing, the goal would be to find "a solution that is intended truly

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[46] Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 174.

[47] See Ballor, "The Aryan Clause, the Confessing Church, and the Ecumenical Movement," 267-275.

[48] DBWE 16:578.

to place the relationship of church and state on new ground," a solution which must include "the young generation of pastors and laypersons who were tested in the Church Struggle."[49] The remaining German Christians would, however, be allowed to form their own free-church organization, "provided that they refrain from political activity and from any new threats to the unity of the church."[50]

Thus, even though as Bonhoeffer put it to Barth in a letter in 1933, "Several of us are now very drawn to the idea of a free church," Bonhoeffer was ultimately unwilling to allow the Reich church under the National Socialist regime to monopolize apparent legitimacy.[51] The question of the relationship between the quasi-legal Confessing Church in Germany and the formally established Reich church continued to be a major question, and one that had implications for international ecumenical work. For these reasons Bonhoeffer observed that the synod of Dahlem, which ratified the Barmen Declaration, asserted "the validity of the entire church, thereby from the outset objecting against all congregationalist and free-church tendencies. Because the Confessing Church wanted to be the one and true church of the gospel, it could not and cannot merely become a sect that gives up the claim upon the entire church, seeking only to nourish its own existence."[52] This assertion meant that the Confessing Church could neither simply abandon its claims to legitimacy within Germany nor could it isolate itself from the broader ecumenical movement.

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[49] DBWE 16:577.

[50] DBWE 16:579.

[51] DBWE 12:165.

[52] DBWE 15:425.

For Bonhoeffer, in fact, the global ecumenical movement was a pressing concern throughout his career. Engagement with ecumenical movement was a resource and litmus test not only for the church struggle but also for Bonhoeffer's broader opposition to the Nazis.[53] Indeed his ecumenical work provided the official cover for his activities in the conspiracy, as it ostensibly provided opportunities for intelligence gathering among foreign church officials and nations.[54] But beyond this pragmatic significance, Bonhoeffer repeatedly challenged the legitimacy of the ecumenical movement to recognize the significance of the confessional fault-lines in the German church struggle. As Bonhoeffer argues, "The German Church Struggle is the second great stage in the history of the ecumenical movement and will be decisive for its future."[55] The Confessing Church presented the ecumenical movement with a clear either/or with respect to the Barmen Declaration. "There is only a yes or a no to this confession as articulated *in a binding fashion* in the Barmen and Dahlem synodal resolutions," writes Bonhoeffer.[56]

The dominant question of Bonhoeffer's challenge to the ecumenical movement had to do with the movement's status as a church: "Is the ecumenical movement in its visible form church?"[57] The question here is the ecclesiastical status of the ecumenical movement, a status which Bonhoeffer leaves open. In the case of an affirmative answer to

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[53] This was another point of disagreement with Barth. See Ballor, "The Aryan Clause, the Confessing Church, and the Ecumenical Movement," 275-278.

[54] See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 783.

[55] DBWE 14:394.

[56] DBWE 14:398.

[57] DBWE 14:399.

this question, the ecumenical movement inherits the duty and responsibility to faithfully and courageously confess itself for Christ and against his enemies. In such a case, that would mean that the ecumenical movement would recognized and deal exclusively with the Confessing Church as a representative of the true Christian church in Germany. There is no room for having representation from both the Reich church and the Confessing Church: "If the Confessing Church were to relent regarding this claim, the Church Struggle in Germany would already be decided *against* it and with that the struggle for Christianity as well."[58] If the ecumenical movement is an expression of the visible church, then it must side with the Confessing Church and against the Aryanization of the German church.

And if the ecumenical movement is a visible form of the church, then it has not only the church's responsibility but its authority. "If the ecumenical movement does indeed claim to be the church of Christ," writes Bonhoeffer, "then it is just as unchanging as the church of Christ in the larger sense; in that case, its work possesses ultimate seriousness and ultimate authority."[59] If such a church is faithful, then it portends the fulfillment of "the old hope of Protestant Christianity in its beginnings for the one, true church of Christ among all the nations of the earth."[60] If it is faithless, however, then it becomes "the titanic and anti-Christian human attempt to make visible what God would rather conceal from our eyes."[61] The ecumenical movement as a church is then either an

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[58] DBWE 14:399.

[59] DBWE 14:399.

[60] DBWE 14:399.

[61] DBWE 14:399.

expression of the New Jerusalem or the manifestation of a new Babylon.

If the ecumenical movement is not a church in its visible form, however, then it becomes an ecclesially-defined kind of voluntary organization. Here we can apply at an international level the same distinction Bonhoeffer makes between the church as an institution and the voluntary Christian organizations that are part of civil society. To put this into more contemporary terms, Pope Francis has recently made a similar distinction with respect to the Roman Catholic Church: The church is "not a perfectly organized non-profit, with so many pastoral plans."[62] The ecumenical movement, if it is not a church, would simply become an international non-governmental organization (NGO) of a particularly ecclesiastical persuasion with no special authority or purview. This is, in fact, a possibility that Bonhoeffer entertains if there is a negative answer to the question of the ecumenical movement's ecclesial character: "It might, after all, be an association of Christians, all of whom are rooted in their own churches, an association that now either comes together for the sake of common tactical-practical action or for nonbinding dialogue with other Christians."[63]

This distinction between the answers whether the ecumenical movement is a visible, institutional form of the church or not has great implications to this for whether and how various Protestant denominations and communions engage in ecumenical work. This is one of the key points I raise in my recent critical engagement with the economic

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[62] Francis I, "Address of Pope Francis to Participants in Rome's Diocesan Conference Entitled: 'A People Who Generates Its Children, Communities, and Families in the Great Stages of Christian Initiation," June 16, 2014, available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco_20140616_apertura-convegno-diocesano.html.

[63] DBWE 14:400.

teachings of the mainline ecumenical groups (Lutheran World Federation, World Communion of Reformed Churches, and World Council of Churches).[64] As Christopher Dorn writes, "Bonhoeffer did not live long enough to witness the WCC's adoption of the Toronto statement (1950), which has provided the foundation for subsequent discussion of the question about the ecclesial status of the ecumenical movement, at least as it is manifested in the WCC, until now."[65] The Toronto Statement, says Dorn, circumscribes the authority of the WCC, assigning it to the realm of what Bonhoeffer would identify as a non-church (even if theologically- or ecclesially-oriented) assembly. Thus the WCC "does not legislate or act on behalf of its member churches. It does not broker unions among these churches. Rather, it seeks to fulfill its mandate by bringing them together to engage in intensive dialogue with one another, especially for the purpose of promoting their common witness and solidarity in service."[66] This would amount to what Bonhoeffer calls "nonbinding theologizing" as opposed to "responsible, legitimate church decisions."[67]

The difficulty with accepting the merely advisory nature of groups like the WCC, however, is that their activities have often ranged far beyond providing a forum for "intensive dialogue." Documents like the Accra Confession, first promulgated by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and reaffirmed by the WCRC, are direct

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[64] See Jordan J. Ballor, *Ecumenical Babel: Confusing Economic Ideology and the Church's Social Witness* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2010).

[65] Christopher Dorn, "The Ecumenical Movement and its Critics: A Reply to Jordan J. Ballor," *Perspectives*, April 2011.

[66] Dorn, "The Ecumenical Movement and its Critics."

[67] DBWE 14:402. A particularly worthy statement of the complex of issues surrounding the authoritative status of the ecumenical movement is Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church? A Critique of the 1966 Geneva Conference on Church and Society* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967).

responses to situations analogous to the situation Bonhoeffer identified in his own time.[68] The Accra Confession is the result of decades of reflection in response to a perceived state of being *in statu confessionis*.[69] It is promoted by the WCRC and supported by intensive efforts at education and adoption by member churches and committees. It provides a fundamental statement of the organization's reason for being.[70] This is, in practice if not in acknowledged theory, far more than an advisory document. Bonhoeffer's wisdom in putting the ecclesiological question at the forefront of evaluations of the ecumenical movement provides a necessary lens through which we might interpret and engage such actions, and where appropriate either implement or ignore them.

Bonhoeffer's heartfelt challenge to the ecumenical movement derived from his concern that Protestantism in particular begin to develop a coherent and authoritative body of moral teaching. The closest analogue among Protestants to the social encyclical tradition in the Roman Catholic Church would be the moral and social teachings of ecumenical

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[68] On the economic teachings of the Accra Confession, see Stan Du Plessis, "How Can You Be a Christian and an Economist? The Meaning of the Accra Declaration for Today," *Faith & Economics* 56 (Fall 2010): 65-79; Roland Hoksbergen, "The Global Economy, Injustice, and the Church: On Being Reformed in Today's World," in *Reformed Mission in an Age of World Christianity: Ideas for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Shirley J. Roels (Grand Rapids: Calvin Press, 2011), 93-103; John Bolt, *Economic Shalom: A Reformed Primer on Faith, Work, and Human Flourishing* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2013), 128-131; and Ballor, *Ecumenical Babel*, 53-77.

[69] See, for instance, Averell Rust, "The Historical Context of the Accra Confession," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): 604-609; and Hans-Wilfred Haase, "Theological Remarks on the Accra Confession," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): 610-612. See also my discussion in *Get Your Hands Dirty: Essays on Christian Social Thought (and Action)* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 147-154.

[70] See, for instance, Phil Tanis, "WCRC Recommits to the Accra Confession," World Communion of Reformed Churches, November 17, 2014, available at: http://wcrc.ch/news/wcrc-recommits-to-the-accra-confession/; and WCRC Global Consultation, "Accra Confession: Ten Years Later," World Communion of Reformed Churches (2014), available at: http://wcrc.ch/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/1114-GlobalAccraConsultationReport.pdf.

bodies who understand themselves to be acting as manifestations of the visible church. Bonhoeffer himself was critically engaged with Roman Catholic moral and social thought, in part because it offered the most developed and coherent body of Christian social teaching, even if there were important fundamental differences in the doctrinal assumptions and ethical methodology between Protestants and Roman Catholics.[71] As we shall see, Bonhoeffer was not averse to reclaiming for Protestants aspects of the Christian moral tradition that had long been considered the sovereign territory of Roman Catholicism.

Monasticism

One of the traditions often associated with Roman Catholicism that Bonhoeffer found especially intriguing was the phenomenon of monasticism. From the beginning, the Reformation churches had an antagonistic relationship with monasticism. Many of the major reformers left monastic orders and had generally critical evaluations of their former callings. The first and most vociferous critic of monasticism was perhaps Martin Luther, who in his 1521 treatise *On Monastic Vows* issued a broadside against the medieval institution.[72]

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[71] Perhaps the best and most accessible statement of the similarities and differences between these two diverse and distinct traditions remains James E. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). For Bonhoeffer's thoughts regarding Roman Catholicism in his correspondence with Bethge, see, for instance, DBWE 16:84-85, 90, 148, and particularly at 126: "I find Catholic ethics in many ways very instructive and more practical than ours. Up to now we have always dismissed it as 'casuistry.'"

[72] LW 44:243-400. See also Heiko A. Oberman, *The Two Reformations: The Journey from the Last Days to the New World*, ed. Donald Weinstein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 44-61.

Bonhoeffer was certainly familiar with Luther's perspective, and can be fairly said largely to have shared it. Bonhoeffer's construal of Luther's view forms a decisive introduction to the former's work *Discipleship* and his famous exposition of "cheap grace," in which Bonhoeffer contends, "Luther's path out of the monastery back to the world meant the sharpest attack that had been launched on the world since early Christianity."[73] To the extent that Luther's criticisms of monasticism are to be understood as an attack on a two-tiered system of spirituality or a clericalist hierarchy of vocations, Bonhoeffer is fully supportive of Luther's views.

Even so, Bonhoeffer is concerned in his own time with the challenges of spiritual and moral formation in an age when a distorted version of Luther's social doctrine had taken root. At issue here is Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, which will be addressed separately in the following chapter. For Bonhoeffer, however, monasticism provided some important resources for meeting the moral challenges of the day, even if Protestants could not affirm the institution without significant, even fundamental, reformation.[74] In a 1935 letter to his brother Karl-Friedrich, Bonhoeffer referred to "The restoration of the church," which "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

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[73] DBWE 4:48.

[74] For Bonhoeffer's early skepticism with respect to "Protestant monasticism," see his review of Friedrich Parpert, *Das Mönchtum Und Die Evangelische Kirche: Ein Beitrag Zur Ausscheidung Des Mönchtums Aus Der Evangelischen Soziologie*, ed. Friedrich Heiler (Munich: Ernst Reinhardt, 1930) in DBWE 10:408-410.

gather people together and do this."[75] Following up on his early doubts about the veracity of any kind of Protestant monasticism, however, later in his *Ethics* manuscripts Bonhoeffer reiterated the basic validity of Luther's critique.[76] There would have to be a radical discontinuity between monasticism as understood in the medieval sense and a modern understanding for it to make any sense to even refer to something like "Protestant monasticism."

Bonhoeffer hints at the contours of this radical reconceptualization of monasticism in his letter to Karl-Friedrich. There must be an emphasis on calling in its comprehensive and worldly, mundane sense. A key aspect of this must be that any separate institutional form of monastic life must be oriented outward. It could not be permanent, both for the theological reasons that the reformers typically outlined (e.g. mortal creatures cannot validly make such absolute vows), as well as because a monastic period must be undertaken in order to equip and prepare one for a return to the world. The pastoral seminary at Finkenwalde was precisely this type of community,[77] a new alternative to the received form of theological training in the university.[78] The seminary brethren were being prepared not to remain in a cloistered exclusion but rather to go and sacrificially serve the world in their callings.

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[75] DBWE 13:285.

[76] DBWE 6:292.

[77] See DBWE 5:19.

[78] See Bonhoeffer's September 11, 1934 letter to Erwin Sutz in DBWE 12:217: "The next generation of pastors, these days, ought to be trained entirely in church-monastic schools, where the pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount, and worship are taken seriously—which for all three of these things is simply not the case at the university and under the present circumstances is impossible."

If the seminary at Finkenwalde is an expression of a new institutional type of monasticism, Bonhoeffer also had in mind a set of communal practices that would reinforce and sustain Christian faithfulness in the midst of worldly pursuit of their callings. The so-called "arcane discipline" refers then to the work of the church in spiritual formation of its members, through sacramental and liturgical practices, "through which the mysteries of the Christian faith are sheltered against profanation."[79] Elsewhere Bonhoeffer speculates about the significance of "ritual [Kultus] and prayer" in a secularized, "religionless situation."[80] These are, admittedly, fragmented and scattered elements of Bonhoeffer's thought, but they connect with a line of concern about the need for rediscovering the essential insights of Christian monasticism and applying them in a new way to a new situation. The barriers between the sacred and the secular would be largely spiritual rather than physical, and in this regard Bonhoeffer's concern for the institutional resources for Christian faithfulness develop in intriguing, and perhaps distinctively Lutheran, ways the ideal of "worldly asceticism" attributed to the Protestant ethic by Max Weber (whose analysis largely omits Lutheranism).[81]

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[79] DBWE 8:373.

[80] DBWE 8:364-365.

[81] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 1992), 53-101. On "Christian asceticism" and "spiritual poverty," see also Peter L. Danner, "Affluence and the Christian Conscience," *Thought* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1967): 220-224.

CHAPTER 7

GOVERNMENT

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the mandates is concerned with the ontological ordering of God's rule in the world, but is not to be understood as a particular statement about the precise form that rule would or should take in any given context. Bonhoeffer's distinction between *government* as a divine mandate and *state* as a particular form of that mandate help illumine this difference. Bonhoeffer writes of the mandates that "only as God's mandates are they divine, not in their actual givenness in this or that concrete form. Not because there *is* work, marriage, government, or church is it *commanded* by God, but because it is *commanded* by God, therefore it *is*."[1] The mandates are the norm by which the particular concrete expressions of the mandate are to be judged. As we shall see, Bonhoeffer employed this understanding of the stability of the requirements of the mandated order of government as a way to judge the validity of the National Socialist state.

In the case of the mandate of government, the "state" is thus to be understood as a particular form or expression of the mandate of government: "State means an ordered commonwealth; government is the power that creates and upholds the order."[2] The state is to be understood primarily as a non-Christian or pagan expression of the grounding of the political order, while government "is the power set in place by God to exercise worldly rule with divine authority. Government is the vicarious representative action of

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[1] DBWE 6:69-70.

[2] DBWE 16:503.

God on earth. It can only be understood from above."[3] Bonhoeffer more clearly distinguishes between the two as he writes that "the concept of government includes no definitive form of commonwealth, no definitive form of the state."[4] From this it also follows that the validity of any particular form of government may to a great degree be historically contextual.[5] Any concrete state is to be ruled and judged by the divine mandate of government.

Although there is no strict ordering of the mandates along the lines of authority or sovereignty, there is a logical ordering to them, so that government presupposes family and work, and relates to church as a sphere with its own authority. Thus Bonhoeffer writes of government in relationship with family and work that it "finds already existing these two mandates through which God the Creator exercises creative power and upon which government must rely. Government itself cannot produce life or values. It is not creative. Government maintains what is created in the order that was given to the creation by God's commission."[6] While the family procreates and work co-creates, government establishes justice and maintains order. Here we see a traditionally Lutheran emphasis on government as the restrainer, an agent of preserving grace: "Government protects what is created by establishing justice in acknowledgment of the divine mandates and by enforcing this

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[3] DBWE 16:504.

[4] DBWE 16:504.

[5] See DBWE 16:527: "No form of the state is as such an absolute guarantee of a proper performance of the office of government. Only concrete obedience to the divine task justifies a form of the state."

[6] DBWE 6:72.

justice with the power of the sword."[7]

Bonhoeffer identifies the core responsibilities for each mandate with the idea of offices, so that the government in a particular concrete form, e.g. state, has the office of preservation of the created order by the administration of justice. All attendant responsibilities are secondary and must be related to the core duty. For the state, the core responsibility is defined in terms of the second table of the Decalogue, which has material continuity with the natural law. In this way Bonhoeffer can affirm that the *epistemological* basis for the duty of the government comes,

> first of all, from the preaching of the church. In the case of a godless government, however, a providential correspondence exists between the contents of the second table and the law inherent in historical life itself. The failure to observe the second table destroys the very life that government is supposed to protect. Thus the task of protecting life, rightly understood, leads inherently to the upholding of the second table. Is the state, then, grounded after all in natural law? No, for here we are speaking only about the government that does not understand itself and nevertheless can arrive providentially at the same decisive insights for its task that are revealed in Jesus Christ to the government that understands itself rightly. Thus, suffice it to say that here natural law is grounded in Jesus Christ.[8]

In this intriguing and rich passage we have a basic statement of the overall thesis of this work, that Bonhoeffer affirms and develops an understanding of natural law, or inherent laws of life, that can only be properly understood as originating from, existing in, and oriented towards Jesus Christ. Elsewhere Bonhoeffer leaves open a tantalizing possibility: "We secure firm ground under our feet only by the biblical grounding of government in Jesus Christ. If and to what extent then from this standpoint a new natural law can be

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[7] DBWE 6:72.

[8] DBWE 16:515.

found is a theological question that remains open."[9]

On Bonhoeffer's view, the government is concerned with the administration of justice, especially and particularly as contained in the elements of the second table. This squares with his understanding of the inseparability of the two tables because the church constantly proclaims the unity of the two tables to the government, so that the true divine basis for governmental authority is made known. He writes, "It is never the task of the church to preach to the state the message of the natural instinct for self-preservation, but only obedience toward what is owed to God. These are two different messages. *The proclamation of the church to the world can always only be Jesus Christ in both law and gospel. The second table cannot be separated from the first*."[10]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Bonhoeffer thus affirms some sort of separation between church and state, in that each has its own divine mandate and responsibility. The government's task with respect to the church, as with the other mandates, is to protect space for the church to operate, to promote religious freedom and practice. One purpose of the state's administration of justice is to leave the world open for the church's proclamation of Jesus Christ, comprehending both tables of the law and the fulfillment of the gospel. In this way, "Government's service to Christ consists in the exercise of its task to secure an outward justice by the power of the sword. In this respect it provides an indirect service to the church-community, which can only thus live a 'quiet and peaceable life' (1 Tim. 2:2)."[11] In fulfilling their respective responsibilities in accord

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[9] DBWE 16:512-513.

[10] DBWE 6:359-60.

[11] DBWE 16:521.

with the divine mandate, church and government mutually reinforce and support one another. "By its service to Christ, government is essentially connected with the church," writes Bonhoeffer. "Where it properly fulfills its task, the church-community can live in peace; for government and church-community serve the same Lord."[12]

It is not that the religious convictions of those in government are of no consequence, for "certainly government officials should also come to faith in Jesus Christ. However, the governmental office remains independent from religious decision. It is, nevertheless, the responsibility of the governmental office to safeguard, indeed to praise, the devout—i.e., to support the cultivation of religion."[13] There is here a secular character to the state's actions, in that it "remains religiously neutral and only inquires after its own task. It can, therefore, never become the subject of the founding of a new religion without dissolving itself. It safeguards any worship that does not undermine the governmental office."[14] Government thus is limited in its calling: "Government will maintain its commitment to the First Commandment by being government in the proper way, also exercising its governmental responsibility toward the church. But it does not have the office of confessing and proclaiming faith in Jesus Christ."[15]

Elsewhere Bonhoeffer articulates the same distinction within the context of the Reformation doctrine of the uses of the law. According to Bonhoeffer, the first use of the law is the so-called *civil* use, which "effects the establishment" of external discipline

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[12] DBWE 16:521.

[13] DBWE 16:523.

[14] DBWE 16:523.

[15] DBWE 16:524.

"through threats and promises."[16] The second use of the law is sometimes called the *theological* use, that which "effects the recognition of sin."[17] The third use "serves the converted as a guiding principle of their action and as chastisement of the flesh still alive even in them."[18] Particularly noteworthy is Bonhoeffer's explication of the uses of the law as variegated applications of a unified reality. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, "The primus usus is the law as preaching about works; the secundus is the law as preaching about the recognition of sin; the tertius is the law as preaching about the fulfillment of the law."[19] The relevance of this for the question of defining the role and responsibilities of government arises in the fact that Bonhoeffer does not distinguish the uses by particular mandates. Often the civil use of the law would be associated with the civil power, and the latter uses of the law would be associated with gospel proclamation in the church.

For Bonhoeffer, however, "the primus usus itself contains the entire contents of the law, namely, the Decalogue in both tables," and is not to be understood as only the purview of the government.[20] Given the mutuality and interdependence of the church and government in Bonhoeffer's formulation, the first use of the law applies to all the mandates. "The one proclaiming the primus usus legis is primarily the church, secondarily the government, head of the family, and master," he writes. "The church proclaims the primus usus by preaching the entire law in all three usus, thus indirectly; the government

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[16] DBWE 16:586.

[17] DBWE 16:586.

[18] DBWE 16:586.

[19] DBWE 16:587.

[20] DBWE 16:587.

proclaims the primus usus directly. The church proclaims the primus usus in the service of the gospel; the government proclaims it as an end in itself. The Decalogue belongs in the church *and* in city hall."[21]

Bonhoeffer is attempting to articulate a fine balance between the respective responsibilities of the church and government in the modern era. This is no simple task, given the historic teachings of the Reformation era on the civil magistrate. "There were eras in which the secular authorities punished the denial of God and idolatry most severely," he writes.[22] One of the charges often leveled against the Protestant Reformation is that it essentially continued, and on some accounts exacerbated, fundamental tensions inherent in the received medieval models of the relationship between church and state.[23] There was nothing approaching a modern doctrine of religious liberty in the views of the major Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions of the sixteenth century.

It is true, in fact, that the magisterial reformers realized that true religion could not be coerced. But this was not the end of their calculus. They feared the hypocrisy that enforcement of religion would inevitably create, but they worried even more about the destructive social and spiritual consequences of an evangelical apostasy. Their judgment that true religion ought to be protected and promoted by the civil authorities was grounded in their principles, in their views about the relative ordering and significance of temporal and eternal realities. Nevertheless, their support for the magisterial care of religion was

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[21] DBWE 16:593.

[22] DBWE 16:638.

[23] Here I draw on a larger argument made in Jordan J. Ballor, "Principle and Prudence: Two Shrines, Two Revolutions, and Two Traditions of Religious Liberty," *Renewing Minds*, no. 3, Spring 2013, 25-26.

also an expression of their pragmatic judgment that apostasy was a greater threat than hypocrisy. The hypocrite might be damned by his or her false piety, but the apostate might lead many others astray, thereby endangering not only the tranquility of the commonwealth but also threatening their eternal salvation.

Bonhoeffer reads the history in this way but arrives at a different conclusion. Thus he writes of religious establishment, "Even though this occurred with the intent to preserve the community from temptation and disorder, nevertheless God was not served by it; for, first, God desires to be worshiped in freedom; second, according to God's plan the powers of temptation must serve the purpose of preserving and strengthening believers; but third, the open denial of God in us is more promising than a hypocritical confession extorted by force."[24] He concludes: "Secular authorities should confer external protection for faith in the God of all Ten Commandments, but disputation with unbelief should be left solely up to the power of the word of God."[25] This leaves Bonhoeffer's position somewhere in between the medieval and early modern Christendom model and a late modern thoroughly secular state. The government has an explicit duty to protect and promote true religion, but not to the exclusion of various forms of free exercise and religious liberty.

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[24] DBWE 16:638. Upon Bonhoeffer's first encounter with Barth during an open house at Barth's residence, Bonhoeffer loosely quoted Luther: "For God the curse of a godless man can be more pleasing than the Hallelujah of the pious!" See DBWE 11:37n5; and Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 176, 961n10. Among possible inspirations for Bonhoeffer's quotation is LW 25:390-91: "For our God is not a God of impatience and cruelty, even toward the ungodly. I am saying this for the comfort of those who are perpetually troubled by thoughts of blasphemies and are in great anxiety; since such blasphemies, because they are violently extorted from men by the devil against their will, they sometimes sound more pleasant in the ear of God than a hallelujah or some kind of hymn of praise. For the more horrible and foul the blasphemy, the more agreeable it is to God, if the heart knows that it does not will this, because the heart did not produce it or choose it."

[25] DBWE 16:638.

One way of understanding the progression of the relationship between Christianity and governing authorities is with just such a threefold typology. First, there was opposition between the pagan government and the Christian church. After the conversion of Constantine, Christianity was recognized and to some extent privileged, although there was a broader establishment of religious toleration.[26] Under Theodosius, however, Christianity was established to the exclusion of other religions, a reality which basically held sway for a millennium. In Bonhoeffer's time, he is arguing for an updated and contextually appropriate version of something more like a Constantinian model rather than a Theodosian. Likewise, he does not want the relationship to devolve into an essentially pagan or thoroughly secular government that does not recognize its divine origin and responsibility, which he understands as manifested, for example, in the French *laïcité* model.[27] The government is to be "religiously neutral" in some sense without indifference to the need for the Christian church to be protected and the Christian origins of the government to be acknowledged.[28]

It is worth pointing here to the similar dynamics at work in Abraham Kuyper's attempts to maintain an institutionally free church while retaining in some sense a "Christian" government. Although there is no evidence that Bonhoeffer was aware of Kuyper, the two faced similar challenges in attempting to come to grips with a responsible contemporary ecclesiology. In his articulation of the Dutch Anti-Revolutionary Party

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[26] See generally Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christian Roots of Religious Freedom* (Minneapolis: Marquette University Press, 2014).

[27] See DBWE 16:592.

[28] DBWE 16:592.

platform, Kuyper outlined three systems: one in which the state ignored religion, another in which there was a single state church, and a third in which "state and church interrelate, each rooted in its own principle."[29] Bonhoeffer's position would roughly equate to Kuyper's own view, the third, with the difference that Bonhoeffer more directly and explicitly connected the government's role with the "natural and revealed knowledge of God" even while maintaining a defined limit to the government's intervention into the realm of the church.[30] For Bonhoeffer, then, the "relatively best form of the state" comes in "neither the separation of state and church nor the state church," but rather in a state whose power is "sustained and secured a) by a strict maintenance of outward justice, b) by the right, grounded in God, of the family and of work, c) by the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ."[31]

Office and Authority

A test case for Bonhoeffer's views of government as a preserving order of divine grace is the challenge represented by National Socialism, and particularly by Hitler himself. The totalitarian aims of the Nazis were a direct threat to the legitimacy of the regime: "Where the state becomes the fulfillment of all spheres of human life and culture, it forfeits its true dignity, its specific authority as government."[32]

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[29] See Kuyper, *Guidance for Christian Engagement in Government: A Translation of Abraham Kuyper's "Our Program"*, trans. and ed. Harry Van Dyke (Grand Rapids: CLP Academic, 2013), 55-59.

[30] See Kuyper, *Guidance for Christian Engagement*, 58.

[31] DBWE 16:525, 528.

[32] DBWE 16:508.

As Bonhoeffer had articulated in his essay "The Church and the Jewish Question," the church would have to prophetically challenge the state if the state were to fail in its central task of establishing law and order. The state could fail in one of two basic ways: "Either *too little* law and order or *too much* law and order compels the church to speak."[33] Where the state does not recognize fundamental rights, or "wherever a group of people is deprived of its rights," the government is failing in its task to maintain justice.[34] On the other extreme, however, is the case in which the government is "developing its use of force to such a degree as to rob the Christian faith of its right to proclaim its message."[35] A litmus test for the legitimacy of any earthly order is whether it remains open to Christ or not in a formal sense. In a case where the state closes off the possibility of gospel proclamation it would undermine its own legitimacy. Or as Bonhoeffer puts it, "A state that threatens the proclamation of the Christian message negates itself."[36]

This was precisely the situation that Bonhoeffer perceived upon the ascension of Adolf Hitler to the highest levels of power in Germany. On January 30, 1933, Hitler became Reich chancellor, and the next day Bonhoeffer gave a radio address, "The Führer and the Individual in the Younger Generation," and he also gave longer versions of the lecture on two different occasions later that same year.[37]

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[33] DBWE 12:364.

[34] DBWE 12:364.

[35] DBWE 12:365.

[36] DBWE 12:365.

[37] DBWE 12:268.

In this piece, we see Bonhoeffer examine the Nazi regime by the standards of the divine mandate of government. In drawing on his understanding of the office and authority of government, Bonhoeffer is making a kind of natural-law argument against the tyranny of the National Socialists. In so doing he outlines a sociological understanding of the origins of the Führer principle and how the tyrant and the youth masses relate to one another. Amid the defeat of Germany in the Great War, the younger generation was given "a convincing impression of the meaninglessness and complete isolation of the individual and of the blunt power of the masses."[38] The ruins of the war left a mass of disconnected and isolated individuals. But the younger generation was not satisfied with this situation, and thus "the younger generation found itself more or less abandoned and having to fend for itself. The problem of the meaning of the defeat in intellectual historical terms was taken up and discussed, with the conclusion that the answer was to be found by overcoming the lack of community among Germans, and that the defeat had to lead to a new sense of community, to new bonds, new authority."[39] The novelty the youth sought came to expression in the phenomenon of the Leader (Führer).

"Authority in the form of the leader—it was in this demand that the younger generation liberated itself from the burden forced upon it," says Bonhoeffer.[40] The new thing about this conception of leadership was that it was disconnected from and discontinuous with received forms of authority. "Previously, leadership had found its expression in teachers, statesmen, fathers, that is, in the given social structure and offices,

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[38] DBWE 12:271.

[39] DBWE 12:272.

[40] DBWE 12:273.

but now the leader has become a completely autonomous form. The leader has become totally divorced from an office; he is essentially and only leader."[41] The idolatry of this kind of undertaking is indirectly asserted by Bonhoeffer. Thus he writes that "The leader was meant to be the friend whom one worshipped, loved, for whom one was willing to sacrifice everything. The leader was meant to be that which they had failed to find in their fathers or teachers."[42] The leader becomes a substitute for obsolete and lesser earthly authorities, and ultimately, for God.

The isolated individualism of the enmassed youth provides impetus for the political solution embodied in the leader. Thus atomistic individualism and collectivist totalitarianism are understood as inherently linked. "The call for political authority, however, in view of the apparently complete failure of previously existing order and conditions, had to become the call for a great person, for a political leader," writes Bonhoeffer.[43] But this political leader becomes the manifestation of the collective authority, power, and responsibility of the otherwise isolated individuals. The leader becomes the mediator for connecting the youth. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, "In this submission, this disconnection [Ausschaltung] of the individual, individualism is truly overcome, but it reappears in the form of the transfer to the new. That which the individual must surrender is transferred from all individuals onto the form of one person who is the leader."[44] The leader becomes the ultimate expression of individuality, and in

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[41] DBWE 12:274.

[42] DBWE 12:275.

[43] DBWE 12:276-277.

[44] DBWE 12:277.

this way the relationship between the leader and the masses "is a form of collectivism that turns into an individualism of the nth degree."[45]

It is at this point that Bonhoeffer contrasts the essentially idolatrous conception of the leader with the divinely-ordained understanding of the governmental office [Amt]. Government conceived of as a calling in accord with the divinely instituted orders is of a totally different nature than the secular models of popular sovereignty. Bonhoeffer contrasts the two thusly: "The leader has authority from below, from the led; the office has authority from above; the authority of the leader depends on the leader's person; the authority of the office is beyond personality; authority from below is self-justification of the people; authority of the office is recognition of given limits; authority from below is authority lent; authority of office is original authority."[46] We can see here how Bonhoeffer juxtaposes an essentially arbitrary and voluntaristic conception of the leader with a vision of political authority that is divinely ordained, limited, and relative. Bonhoeffer even goes so far as to conclude by invoking "the eternal law of individuality before God," which is violated when a leader "takes on superhuman responsibility, which in the end will crush him."[47] It is in the very nature of the political office to be subject and accountable to God, and any authority that violates its responsibility violates God's law and courts disaster. In seeking to become the mediator between individuals and all other realities, the leader has set itself up against God: "Leader and office that turn themselves into gods mock God and the solitary individual before him who is becoming

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[45] DBWE 12:277.

[46] DBWE 12:278.

[47] DBWE 12:281.

the individual, and must collapse. Only the leader who is in the service of the penultimate and ultimate authority merits loyalty."[48]

War

The reality that Bonhoeffer already perceived at that early stage, the idolatrous nature and totalitarian aims of the National Socialist regime, would dominate the rest of his life. If such a regime no longer merited loyalty, what was the responsible person to do? The Bonhoeffer family realized, at least in broad strokes, what was coming. As Eberhard Bethge relates, on the evening of Hitler's assumption of power "Dietrich's brother-in-law, Rüdiger Schleicher, returned home and announced: 'This means war!'"[49] Certainly this particular war was to be rejected, but what were Bonhoeffer's views regarding war and peace, and what sort of opposition to Hitler's regime might be legitimately undertaken?

Bonhoeffer has, ever since his death, been depicted as a pacifist.[50] We have seen, however, that Bonhoeffer defined the state in terms of its special provision for justice through the use of coercive force.[51] This applies to war as well as to internal police action, so that Bonhoeffer throughout his career consistently viewed war as a potentially valid, even if extreme, exercise of governmental authority. In his 1927 dissertation *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer writes, "Where a people, submitting in conscience to God's will,

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[48] DBWE 12:282.

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

[50] See, for instance, Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004).

[51] For an explication of Bonhoeffer's fundamentally Lutheran approach to this responsibility, see Jordan J. Ballor, *Get Your Hands Dirty: Essays on Christian Social Thought (and Action)* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 197-201.

goes to war in order to fulfill its historical purpose and mission in the world–though entering fully into the ambiguity of human sinful action–it knows it has been called upon by God, that history is to be made; here war is no longer murder."[52]

In another essay from 1933, "The Church and the Jewish Question," Bonhoeffer asserts that the church "knows about the essential necessity for the use of force in this world, and it knows about the 'moral' injustice that is necessarily involved in the use of force in certain concrete state actions."[53] As this applies to war we can see here perhaps a faint echo of the traditional just war distinction between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*.

In his mature work in the *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer again reiterates his view of the ethical status of war:

> The killing of an enemy in war is not arbitrary; for even if the enemy is not personally guilty, the enemy still consciously takes part in the attack of another people on the life of my people and must therefore share the consequences of bearing the common guilt. The killing of a criminal who has encroached on another life is, of course, not arbitrary. Nor is the killing of civilians in war arbitrary when it is not directly intended, but is only the unfortunate result of a necessary military action.[54]

Any account of Bonhoeffer and pacifism will have to account for such consistent and explicit ethical judgments made throughout his theological corpus. We might judge too with Green that war when justified is "the necessary precondition of peace and a means to peace."[55] Earlier Bonhoeffer had already concluded, "It would be an utter perversion of one's ethical sensibility to believe that my first duty is to love my enemy and precisely in

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[52] DBWE 1:119.

[53] DBWE 12:363.

[54] DBWE 6:189.

[55] DBWE 6:16.

so doing to surrender my neighbor to destruction, in the most concrete sense."[56]

What then are we to make of Bonhoeffer's involvement with the assassination plot? Shall we bracket it out as valid historical evidence because as some have claimed "we cannot know how Bonhoeffer understood his participation in the attempt to kill Hitler"?[57] Or perhaps the evidence for his involvement in the plot has been overdrawn.[58]
I do claim that remaining agnostic about Bonhoeffer's involvement in the conspiracy ignores a valid and important piece of evidence, evidence that cannot be dismissed by reading it as simply inconsistent with his convictions. Here are three items of relevance for interpreting how a decision to be involved in an assassination conspiracy may be reconciled with Bonhoeffer's thought.

First, Bonhoeffer's view of direct political action by the church is of relevance. This is the third and rarest type of action that the church takes toward the state, and it only is valid when the state is in the act of negating itself by creating lawlessness and disorder instead of law and order. In 1933, however, Bonhoeffer offers the additional condition that such a move must be decided by an "evangelical council" and "cannot be casuistically construed beforehand."[59] A modification or removal of this condition could theoretically open the door for individual Christian action. Bonhoeffer may have seen the approval of an ecclesiastical council of less necessity or less desirable, or frankly less likely, after the long

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[56] DBWE 10:370-371.

[57] Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, 36.

[58] See, for instance, Mark Thiessen Nation, Anthony G. Siegrist, and Daniel P. Umbel, *Bonhoeffer the Assassin? Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

[59] DBWE 12:367.

decade of the 1930s left the Confessing Church wearied and worn. He writes of the state which has in actuality negated itself: "An apocalyptic understanding of a concrete government would have to entail total disobedience; for in that case every single act of obedience is manifestly connected with a denial of Christ (Rev. 13:7)."[60]

A second important idea to consider in Bonhoeffer's thought is the recurring theme of the exceptional season, the times that are "out of joint," which require responsible action above and beyond the normal guides for ethical judgment. Thus Bonhoeffer writes that "there are occasions when, in the course of historical life, the strict observance of the explicit law of a state, a corporation, a family, but also of a scientific discovery, entails a clash with the basic necessities of human life [Lebensnotwendigkeiten]."[61] On these occasions "appropriate responsible action departs from the domain governed by laws and principles, from the normal and regular, and instead is confronted with the extraordinary situation of ultimate necessities that are beyond any possible regulation by law."[62] In these extraordinary times only a living relationship with the Lord of the law can lead to appropriate action. These circumstances "appeal directly to the free responsibility of the one who acts, a responsibility not bound by any law. They create an extraordinary situation, and are in essence borderline cases. They no longer permit human reasoning [ratio] to come up with a variety of exit strategies, but pose the question of the ultima ratio."[63] The ultimate reason or rationale may not, in fact, be rationally defensible or

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[60] DBWE 16:517.

[61] DBWE 6:272-73.

[62] DBWE 6:273.

[63] DBWE 6:273.

justifiable by appeal to precedent, tradition, or moral sanction.

And finally, Bonhoeffer's depiction of vicarious representative action as the responsible action of the free ethical agent bears on his decision to freely bear the responsibility for his involvement in the conspiracy. In referring to the ethical bond which first binds us to Christ and then binds us to others, he writes, "The *bond* has the form of *vicarious representative action* and *accordance with reality [Wirklichkeitsgemäßheit]*. Freedom exhibits itself in *my accountability [Selbstzurechnung]* for my living and acting, and in the *venture [Wagnis]* of concrete decision."[64] Robin W. Lovin describes Bonhoeffer's idea of vicarious representative action as "an act based on a sound reading of the facts and a type of civil courage which can be shared with others; and yet, properly understood, the venture involves a risk of personal corruption so great that only one who believes in the power of a Christian grace is likely to undertake it."[65] It is in this way Bonhoeffer lives out Luther's famous dictum, "Sin boldly!", ultimately relying only on the vicarious representative atonement of Jesus Christ for salvation, and not on the ethical righteousness of any human works. For as Luther's dictum begins, "Be a sinner and sin boldly," so it also concludes, "but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are here [in this world] we have to sin."[66]

In a moving passage written before the rise of the National Socialists to power,

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[64] DBWE 6:257.

[65] Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Faith and Public Choices: The Social Ethics of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 139.

[66] LW 48:282.

Bonhoeffer reflects on the challenge of war and the Christian life:

> The situation seems clear to me. In such cases, I no longer have the choice between good and evil; regardless of which decision I make, that decision will soil me with the world and its laws. I will take up arms with the terrible knowledge of doing something horrible, and yet knowing I can do no other. I will defend my brother, my mother, my people, and yet I know that I can do so only by spilling blood; but love for my people will sanctify murder, will sanctify war. As a Christian, I will suffer from the entire dreadfulness of war. My soul will bear the entire burden of responsibility in its full gravity. I will try to love my enemies against whom I am sworn to the death, as only Christians can love their brothers. And yet I will have to do to those enemies what my love and gratitude toward my own people commands me to do, the people into whom God bore me. And finally I will recognize that Christian decisions are made only within the ongoing relationship with God, within a constantly renewed surrender of oneself to the divine will. I can rest assured that even if the world does violence to my conscience, I can make only one decision, namely, the one to which God leads me in the sacred hour of encounter between my will and God's will, in the hour in which God conquers my will.[67]

Two Kingdoms

This sense of being soiled "with the world and its laws" reflects the tension in Bonhoeffer's thought of understanding the Christian call to be faithful to Christ in the hurly-burly of worldly existence. This same concern animates contemporary debates about the place of natural law, and particularly the Protestant doctrine of the two-kingdoms, in determining the appropriate Christian posture towards the broader culture.[68] These debates have largely taken place between adherents of Reformed traditions, but I contend that the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer has something

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[67] DBWE 10:372.

[68] The following discussion is adapted and updated from the analysis in Jordan J. Ballor, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Two Kingdoms, and Protestant Social Thought Today," *La Revue Farel* 6/7 (2011-2012): 66-69.

to teach both Dutch neo-Calvinists as well as confessional presbyterians.[69]

Bonhoeffer's understanding of Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms is contained in the larger context of his teaching on the divine mandates in his *Ethics*, particularly with respect to church and government. But his understanding of the "polemical unity" of the two kingdoms is at work in other writings, notably *Discipleship*, which militates against any absolute structural secularism between social institutions. In this way Bonhoeffer's primary concern with the two kingdoms doctrine as it was being used in his own time was that it allowed for a kind of radical independence of the world from the church, the former understood as secular and the latter as sacred. As Bonhoeffer writes, "This division of the whole of reality into sacred and profane, or Christian and worldly, sectors creates the possibility of existence in only one of these sectors: for instance, a spiritual existence that takes no part in worldly existence, and a worldly existence that can make good its claim to autonomy over against the sacred sector."[70] Bonhoeffer finds this division to be deeply antithetical to the biblical faith and the central insights of the Reformation: "There are not two realities, but *only one reality*, and that is God's reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world."[71] In this way Bonhoeffer describes Luther's two-kingdoms teaching as requiring a "polemical unity," since "in the name of a better Christianity Luther used the world to protest against a type of Christianity that was making itself independent by

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[69] On the contemporary debate, see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); idem, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); and idem, "Calvin, Kuyper, and 'Christian Culture,'" in *Always Reformed: Essays in Honor of W. Robert Godfrey*, ed. R. Scott Clark and Joel E. Kim (Escondido: Westminster Seminary California, 2010), 135-153.

[70] DBWE 6:57.

[71] DBWE 6:58.

separating itself from the reality of Christ. Similarly, Christianity must be used polemically today against the worldly in the name of a better worldliness; this polemical use of Christianity must not end up again in a static and self-serving sacred realm."[72] Bonhoeffer is so concerned about the secularistic application of two kingdoms thinking in his own day that he even contends that "we must get beyond this two-realms image."[73]

"Only in this sense of a polemical unity," contends Bonhoeffer, "may Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms [Zwei Reiche] be used."[74] This unity is polemical because it demolishes any autonomous claims of existence apart from Jesus Christ himself: "The world is not divided between Christ and the devil; it is completely the world of Christ, whether it recognizes this or not. As this reality in Christ it is to be addressed, and thus the false reality that it imagines itself to have, in itself or in the devil, is to be destroyed."[75] At the same time, however, Bonhoeffer shares with contemporary advocates of two-kingdoms doctrine, the concern that the church as a visible community maintain its uniqueness. Bonhoeffer writes that "the church occupies a certain space in the world that is determined by its worship, its order, and its congregational life, and this very fact is the point of departure for thinking in terms of realms in general. It would be very dangerous to overlook this, to deny the visibility of the church, and thus to devalue it into a purely

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[72] DBWE 6:60. For a historical account of Luther's doctrine, see William J. Wright, *Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

[73] DBWE 6:66.

[74] DBWE 6:60.

[75] DBWE 6:65.

spiritual entity."[76] Bonhoeffer's worry here is exactly the same as that of David VanDrunen about the legacy of neo-Calvinism: "The church, unfortunately for neo-Calvinism, is not the sort of institution designed by Christ to be one among equals for Christians. Neo-Calvinism has not only made little progress in transforming Western civilization (or even Holland, or South Holland), but it has to an alarming degree lost the importance and uniqueness of the church along the way as well."[77] The danger of single-sphere transformationalist excess is cultural accommodation, while the danger of two-kingdom isolationism is secular quietism.

Robin W. Lovin argues that Bonhoeffer's views as expressed in *Discipleship* "are best understood as attempts to test formulations of Protestant church-state relations against the political demands of his own time."[78] In this way we can understand that there is an element to Bonhoeffer's understanding of the doctrine of the two kingdoms that is deeply informed by his concern over the obeisance of the leadership of the Christian church to the Third Reich. But even if we see the "polemical unity" of the two kingdoms advocated by Bonhoeffer as highly contextual, we can also see how he shares concerns with both Abraham Kuyper and VanDrunen, respectively, that there be no radical or ultimate sacred/secular distinction between the church and the world, *and* that the church as a visible community maintain its unique independence and responsibility: "When one therefore wants to speak of the space of the church, one must be aware that this space has

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[76] DBWE 6:62-63.

[77] VanDrunen, "Calvin, Kuyper, and 'Christian Culture,'" 147-148.

[78] Robin W. Lovin, "The Christian and the Authority of the State: Bonhoeffer's Reluctant Revisons," in *Ethical Responsibility: Bonhoeffer's Legacy to the Churches*, ed. John D. Godsey and Geffrey B. Kelly (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), 104.

already been broken through, abolished, and overcome in every moment by the witness of the church to Jesus Christ. Thus all false thinking in terms of realms is ruled out as endangering the understanding of the church."[79]

Bonhoeffer's articulation of the two-kingdoms doctrine as valid only as construed within the "polemical unity" of the cosmic lordship of Jesus Christ is best understood within the broader context of his thought of the divine mandates. In this way, Bonhoeffer does not acknowledge the separation of the world into ontologically separate realms or kingdoms, even while he does advocate a pluriformity of divine orders and authorities, including church and government along with family and culture. In this sense, then, Bonhoeffer allows for variegated expressions of Christ's rule in the world.

As we have seen, Bonhoeffer's ethical thought comes to mature expression in his doctrine of the mandates, or the structures of the divine commandment, which represent his attempt at a reconciling position between the modern natural law/divine command options for the grounding of ethics. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, "Jesus Christ's claim to rule as it is proclaimed by the church simultaneously means that family, culture, and government are set free to be what they are in their own nature as grounded in Christ."[80] This is an attempt to retain the best of both: the permanence and objective normativity of natural law, and the situational sensitivity of divine command. This lively normativity finds its expression in the living person of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the moral law. Understood properly, Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the mandates is best represented as grounded in a form

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[79] DBWE 6:64.

[80] DBWE 6:402.

of *Christological* natural law, or “Christonomy,”[81] as describing what might be called a *Christotelic* order, with Christ as the creational and ontological grounding of and ultimate end and norm for the mandates.

[81] DBWE 6:402n3.

CHAPTER 8

AFTER BONHOEFFER

In his survey of Roman Catholic and Protestant ethics, James M. Gustafson levelled this devastating judgment with regard to the state of Protestant social thought: "The situation of Protestant church with regard to moral teachings is only a little short of chaos."[1] This chaos has only deepened in the intervening decades, but I have contended in this study that Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ethical thought, developed and refined in the crucible of chaos in the era of National Socialism in Germany, provides significant resources for addressing the shortcomings of modern Protestant ethics. Bonhoeffer's relevance for the rehabilitation of Protestant social thought today lies primarily in his dynamic doctrine of ethical mandates, an effective and cogent articulation of a uniquely Protestant natural-law line of thinking.

Bonhoeffer's framework of the four mandates provides an excellent beginning to the project to, as he put it, "contribute to renewing and reclaiming the old concepts of order, estate, and office."[2] This is an especially critical task as Protestant churches look for resources for ethical deliberation and guidance in the period of post-Barthian "hegemony," to use Stephen J. Grabill's phrase.[3] Even in Bonhoeffer's own time he detected this lacuna:

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[1] James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics: Prospects for Rapprochement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 130.

[2] DBWE 6:390.

[3] Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 21.

"The concept of the natural has fallen into disrepute in Protestant ethics."[4] As useful and as necessary as it is to return to the traditional sources (primarily the Bible, but also the great thinkers of the Christian tradition, particularly those of the Reformation and post-Reformation eras), it is also helpful to find figures closer to our own time who exhibit the kind of brilliance and thoughtfulness apparent in Bonhoeffer's work. Bonhoeffer's ethical thought shows us definitively that natural law must be one of the essential tools in our theological toolbox, so to speak, when we are addressing the challenges of following Jesus Christ today. As Bonhoeffer observed, "We must replace rusty weapons with bright steel," and the moral steeliness of Christian natural-law traditions, of which Bonhoeffer's own work is a manifestation, is invaluable in this regard.[5]

Bonhoeffer's reflections in his essay "After Ten Years," written after a decade of Nazi rule in Germany, illustrate this powerfully: "One thing has emerged that seems certain: in the common life of human beings, there are laws that are stronger than everything that believes it can supersede them, and that it is therefore not only wrong but unwise to disregard these laws."[6] In his *Ethics* Bonhoeffer continued to emphasize the identification and adherence to these laws as the pressing ethical challenge of his time. Whether talking about "a more impersonal or a more personal entity," the responsibility remained the same: "The axioms of mathematics and logic are as much a part of this as the

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[4] DBWE 6:171.

[5] DBWE 6:81. This section rehearses and develops some of the points previously made in Jordan J. Ballor, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Two Kingdoms, and Christian Social Thought Today," *La Revue Farel* 6/7 (2011-2012): 72-75; and idem, "Natural Law and Protestantism—A Review Essay," *Christian Scholar's Review* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 208-209.

[6] DBWE 8:45. See also Bonhoeffer's definition in DBWE 6:362: "Reason—law of what is created—of what exists."

state and family, a factory, or a corporation. The task in each case is to discover the respective intrinsic law by which the entity subsists."[7]

The dynamic insight of Bonhoeffer's work was to more directly and explicitly connect these natural laws of created life with the Logos of creation, Jesus Christ. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer of Christ, "As the Real One he is the origin, essence, and goal of all reality. That is why he himself is the lord and the law of the real."[8] The task of Christian ethics, then, is to recognize Christ as the lord of the law of created reality and act in accordance with his will as revealed in that law. "To be in accord with reality," and behind that reality Jesus Christ, writes Bonhoeffer, "responsible action has to discern and comply with these laws."[9]

In many ways, this program of Bonhoeffer's can be viewed as an exercise in attempting to make possible the impossible, to coherently and responsibly connect special revelation and natural life. As the theologian and economist Paul Heyne has written, "The doctrine of *Schöpfungsordunungen* is thus an obvious Protestant (more specifically Lutheran) counterpart to the Roman Catholic use of natural law."[10] Heyne goes on to outline the tensions between even a modified, Protestant form of natural law and the teaching of the Reformation itself. His conclusion is that, given the metaphysical constraints of contemporary ways of thinking, "It is impossible for Protestantism to

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[7] DBWE 6:271.

[8] DBWE 6:263.

[9] DBWE 6:271.

[10] Paul Heyne, "Justice, Natural Law, and Reformation Theology," in *"Are Economists Basically Immoral?" and Other Essays in Economics, Ethics, and Religion*, ed. Geoffrey Brennan and A. M. C. Waterman (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008), 138.

reaffirm the theory of natural law at this point in history."[11] The debate, it seems, is whether natural law is, as Heyne argues, "a useless weapon," or, as I have argued, it is as it appears in Bonhoeffer's thought: a rusty weapon in need of burnishing into "bright steel."[12]

This apparent impossibility of reconciling natural law and the Reformation is, in part, why the natural, including concepts like natural revelation, natural theology, and natural law, have and continued to be largely unfashionable among modern Protestant theologians: "The concept gradually came to seem untenable, irrelevant, or perhaps even unnecessary and embarrassing under the hammering of legal positivists."[13] When faced with the dangers associated with either fideism or naturalism, theologians tend to favor the former over the latter. But both are dangers that must be avoided, says Bonhoeffer, and the only way to do so is to discern and tease out the relationship between nature and grace, the penultimate and the ultimate. Bonhoeffer's program to ground the divine mandates in Jesus Christ is an attempt to do precisely this: to relativize and thereby rightly order and value created reality. Doing so may indeed require the formulation of a different metaphysic than that which dominates today. It may well be that attempts to ground natural law theories without reference to divine origin, and specifically grounding in Jesus Christ, are doomed to fail. It is precisely at this point that Bonhoeffer's Christological formulation of natural-law as theologically grounded becomes salient.

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[11] Heyne, "Justice, Natural Law, and Reformation Theology," 145.

[12] Heyne, "Justice, Natural Law, and Reformation Theology," 148; DBWE 6:81.

[13] Heyne, "Justice, Natural Law, and Reformation Theology," 143.

Barth and Bonhoeffer Reconsidered

The nature of this dispute over the relevance and possibility of using even modified Protestant forms of natural law today also leads to a need to reconsider the nature of the relationship between Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth. In an earlier article, I explored how Barth's programmatic rejection of natural theology and its attendant doctrines is discontinuous with Bonhoeffer at various points. The three in particular I highlight are the centrality of the Aryan clauses as occasioning a *status confessionis*, the significance of the Barmen Declaration and the nature of the Confessing Church's role in the church struggle, and the relevance of the ecumenical movement.[14] John Michael Owen challenges my reading of the historical situation and the nature of the relationship between Barth and Bonhoeffer in a subsequent article.[15]

Owen renders a service by a careful recounting of the historical contexts surrounding the imposition of the Aryan clauses on the churches and Barth and Bonhoeffer's respective attitudes toward it. He points out that "Bonhoeffer and Barth's letters show no sign of disagreement on whether the exclusion of Jews from ministry called for the faith to be confessed."[16] This is indeed true. The disagreement was over the appropriate course of action in recognition of this *status confessionis* and whether this confessional responsibility was in fact one in which the faith was either confessed or betrayed. Bonhoeffer advocates for a public exit from the German church, while Barth

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[14] Jordan J. Ballor, "The Aryan Clause, the Confessing Church, and the Ecumenical Movement: Barth and Bonhoeffer on Natural Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59, no. 3 (August 2006): 263-280.

[15] John Michael Owen, "Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the Aryan Clause, 1933-1935: A Response to Jordan Ballor," *Colloquium* 42, no. 1 (May 2010): 3-28.

[16] Owen, "Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the Aryan Clause, 1933-1935," 17.

advocates perseverance. "I am indeed in favor of waiting to see what comes. If there is to be schism, it must come from the other side," writes Barth.[17] Bonhoeffer and Barth are thus in apparent agreement over the confessional seriousness of the situation, but disagree on the course of response. It is clear that Barth believes the situation to be evil, that it requires a response out of confessional convictions, but that the worst has not yet been realized. When the schism comes, speculates Barth,

> Perhaps it will come immediately, in the form of a response to the protest on behalf of the Jewish Christian pastors. Perhaps this vain doctrine that now rules the church will still have to aggrandize itself through other and even worse errors and distortions. In that connection I have looked at a lot of German Christian literature since I have been here and can only say that I am expecting the worst in every way. It could well happen that the clash will come over an even more central point.[18]

What might such an "even more central point" be? I have argued that for Barth it was the question of the idolatry of natural theology, of which the Aryan clauses were simply an expression.

Owen, however, construes the disagreement between Bonhoeffer and Barth as essentially tactical and not as a disagreement in principle. "Yet with all the points at which Bonhoeffer's story differed from Barth's, no real difference emerges between them in their fundamental opposition to the Aryan clause 1933-1935," he concludes.[19] But as Bethge judges, "Even like-minded theologians such as Karl Barth and Hermann Sasse decided to wait for even 'worse' heresies than the 'racial conformity' of the Civil Service Law."[20]

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[17] DBWE 12:167.

[18] DBWE 12:167.

[19] Owen, "Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the Aryan Clause, 1933-1935," 28.

[20] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 325.

Whether this is an unfair construal of Barth's position is debatable. It should be noted, however, that Larry L. Rasmussen, the editor of the English edition of Bonhoeffer's Berlin volume, makes a similar judgment. Barth, writes Rasmussen, "thought the opposition should await something more doctrinally decisive than the Aryan paragraph before they took action appropriate to *status confessionis*.… Bonhoeffer and Hildebrandt were disappointed: What could be 'more central' to Christian faith and authentic church than rejection of the Aryan paragraph?"[21] There is disagreement between Barth and Bonhoeffer on the proper response to the situation, and it is entirely plausible to construe the difference as reflecting a difference in assessing the centrality of the threat.

In reflecting on my portrayal of the situation, Owen is correct to contend that "it does not help us appreciate the nature of Bonhoeffer's ultimate actions to have him portrayed as the one who unerringly made the truly principled decisions all through the story."[22] It is wrong to assume that Bonhoeffer took the only morally responsible route or that Barth's response was not morally serious.[23] But even if my judgments of Barth were too hastily made and partially overdrawn, Barth *himself* admits that he did not see the dangers of the situation with the same clarity as Bonhoeffer. In a letter to Eberhard Bethge in 1967, upon receiving a copy of Bethge's biography, Barth writes,

> Especially new to me was the fact that in 1933 and the years following, Bonhoeffer was the first and almost the only one to face and tackle the Jewish question so centrally and energetically. I have long since regarded it as a fault on my part that I

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[21] DBWE 12:36.

[22] Owen, "Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the Aryan Clause, 1933-1935," 23.

[23] See, for instance, Eberhard Busch, "Indissoluble Unity: Barth's Position on the Jews during the Hitler Era," in *For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 53-79; and Katherine Sonderegger, "Response to 'Indissoluble Unity,'" in *For the Sake of the World*, 80-88.

> did not make this question a decisive issue, at least publicly in the church conflict (e.g., in the two Barmen Declarations I drafted in 1934). A text in which I might have done so would not, of course, have been acceptable to the mindset of even the "confessors" of that time, whether in the reformed or the general synod. But this does not excuse the fact that since my interests were elsewhere I did not at least formally put up a fight on the matter.[24]

Here Barth admits what many others have observed: Bonhoeffer saw more clearly and earlier than many of his contemporaries the centrality of "the Jewish question."

The result of all this is that the relationship between Barth and Bonhoeffer was enormously complex, and that my construal of Bonhoeffer's natural-law doctrine is one key element in a necessary reassessment of their respective theological projects. Owen is correct to note that it is important "not to think of relations between theologians only in terms of whether they agree or not. What was most important for Bonhoeffer was Barth's ability to help him think through questions that plagued him, though that did go with a sense that Barth saw central things in the right way."[25] Early in his theological career, Bonhoeffer was most certainly influenced by Barth. The relevant questions are to what extent Bonhoeffer's interaction with Barth involved disagreement as their respective works progressed, to what extent not only was Bonhoeffer influenced by Barth, but also to what extent Barth may have been influenced by Bonhoeffer.

It is easy to find early passages in which Bonhoeffer evinces a kind of "eventism" that strongly echoes Barth's occasionalist ontology. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer in an early lecture, concerning the divine will and its demands, "Each particular moment will reveal

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[24] Letter to Eberhard Bethge, 22 May 1967, in Karl Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), no. 252, p. 250. See also David Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 126-128.

[25] Owen, "Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the Aryan Clause, 1933-1935," 4.

the nature of that will. You must merely be perfectly clear that your own will must in every instance be accommodated to the divine will; your will must be surrendered if the divine will is to be realized."[26] The occasionalistic assumptions are even more clear where Bonhoeffer says "There are no ethical principles enabling Christians, as it were, to make themselves moral. Instead, one has only the decisive moment at hand, that is, every moment that is of potential ethical value. Never, however, can yesterday decisively influence my moral actions today."[27]

Many commentators take these kinds of early comments, clearly influenced by Barth's theology, as definitive and determinative for Bonhoeffer's entire career. The coherence of such views with Bonhoeffer's early doctrine of the orders of preservation and other formulations such as the laws of life and the divine mandates is assumed and interpreted through an occasionalistic lens. Barth does this, for example, in his later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* that interact with Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*. As Barth writes, the connection between the stability of something like natural law and the vitality of divine command ethics "depends on whether anything can be known about the horizontal, the permanence, continuity and constancy of the divine command and human action."[28] Barth highlights Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the mandates as "more helpful than that of Althaus and Brunner because in it he has perceived that what is involved in the constancy of ethical events must also be learned only from the Word of God."[29] Barth, however,

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[26] DBWE 10:365.

[27] DBWE 10:365.

[28] CD IV/3:18.

[29] CD IV/3:21-22.

construes these mandates in a way that violates Bonhoeffer's balance between creational laws and divine commands. For Barth, these "'mandates' are not laws somehow immanent in created reality…. They do not emerge from reality; they descend into it."[30]

However, by the time Bonhoeffer begins writing his *Ethics*, he has overcome the one-sidedness of such formulations. It is true ontologically that the mandates are entirely "from above." Epistemologically, though, they can to some extent come to be known in their concrete expression "from below." Barth writes that the mandates are not to "be established at random by the moralist and proclaimed in a form which he himself discovers."[31] Barth proceeds to accuse Bonhoeffer of his own kind of arbitrariness: "In Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the mandates, is there not just a suggestion of North German patriarchalism?"[32]

Bonhoeffer talks at length, however, what the discovery process of the "intrinsic law" of a created reality would entail. As we have seen, Bonhoeffer contends that "the task in each case is to discover the respective intrinsic law by which the entity subsists. The more the object is tied to human existence, the more difficult it is to discern its intrinsic law."[33] The discovery of these innate laws helps to establish moral norms that retain a measure of stability and reliability. To act otherwise, warns Bonhoeffer, is to court disaster: "Reckless disrespect and violation of these laws is a misperception of reality,

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[30] CD IV/3:22.

[31] CD IV/3:22.

[32] CD IV/3:22.

[33] DBWE 6:271.

which sooner or later must exact its revenge."[34]

What had previously been understood as the standard ethical disposition of the human person before God becomes under this system the exceptional case of a special ethic. Where previously the creature had stood simply passively before the Creator unable to discern moment to moment what the new ethical demands of the discrete situation might be, now this situation is only realized in a borderline, extreme case. In such instances where "the strict observance of the explicit law of a state, a corporation, a family, but also of a scientific discovery, entails a clash with the basic necessities of human life [Lebensnotwendigkeiten]," then "appropriate responsible action departs from the domain governed by laws and principles, from the normal and regular, and instead is confronted with the extraordinary situation of ultimate necessities that are beyond any possible regulation by law."[35] Bonhoeffer has thus reserved to the occasional extreme circumstance the occasionalism of his earlier formulations. Where earlier Bonhoeffer had proclaimed "There is no law with a specific content, but only the law of freedom, that is, bearing responsibility alone before God and oneself," later he emphasizes the concrete responsibilities of the divine mandates, the specific duties they involve and demand.[36]

From the beginning Bonhoeffer recognizes the twin dangers of arbitrary volatility and ossified stability. In a letter to Sabine and Gerhard Leibholz in 1940, Bonhoeffer identifies these respectively as "the positivist and the idealist theories."[37] In the former

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[34] DBWE 6:272.

[35] DBWE 6:272-273.

[36] DBWE 10:367.

[37] DBWE 15:300.

case, the validity and reality of history and creation would be undermined. For idealist, formal theories, the danger is “relativization of the historical, the norms of creation.” For the immanentist, positivist theories, the danger is “relativization of the revelation.” These two extremes “must be avoided,” says Bonhoeffer, in favor of “the biblical-Christian teaching based upon revelation.”[38] Bonhoeffer sees that Karl Barth began his enterprise with the right emphasis on the priority of revelation, but that he was unable to effectively move beyond this sphere. Thus, for Bonhoeffer Barth’s failure lies not in the concrete ethical judgments he makes but rather lies in the fact that for “the nonreligious interpretation of theological concepts he gave no concrete guidance, either in dogmatics or ethics.”[39] This is at the heart of Bonhoeffer’s criticism of Barth’s “posivitism of revelation,” which is to be understood as juxtaposed with positivism based on history or nature.

Some recent studies have argued persuasively that Barth ultimately was not able to rest on the unstable foundations of this “positivism of revelation,” and functionally, if not theoretically or fully coherently, embraced a kind of natural-law ethic.[40] An essay by Jesse Couenhoven convincingly argues that “Barth’s mature work, however, develops an ontological ethic that has significant resonances with natural law theory.”[41] An important

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[38] DBWE 15:300-301.

[39] DBWE 8:429.

[40] See, for instance, Matthew Rose, *Ethics with Barth: God, Metaphysics, and Morals* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 198: “This essay has labored to defend Barth against the charge that he regards the goods as the product of a divine will lacking intrinsic connection to created human nature.” Cf. James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology: The Gifford Lectures for 1991 Delivered in the University of Edinburgh* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 162.

[41] Jesse Couenhoven, “Karl Barth’s Eschatological (rejection of) Natural Law: An Eschatological Natural Law Theory of Divine Command,” in *Natural Law and Evangelical*

line of investigation for the development of Protestant social thought would be to place the mature Barth in direct dialogue with Bonhoeffer as respective representatives of Protestant adherents to natural-law ethics. If even an arch-critic of natural theology and natural law like Karl Barth ends up being a kind of natural lawyer, this is powerful evidence of the truth of what David S. Caudill observed: "Natural law, in a sense, is the fallback position for all of us."[42]

Bonhoeffer's Ethics: Prospects and Problems

One of the hallmarks of Luther's social thought was in fact the articulation of three holy "estates," namely the church, the family, and the civil magistrate. No matter in which estate a Christian serves, however, none represents more or less of a privileged spiritual estate. Each estate is equally "holy." Where vocation had referred to a specifically religious calling to serve in a religious institution of one form or another, Luther views a vocation as the calling of a Christian to serve in any and all of these three estates.

Luther adds to these three an understanding of the "common order of love" that connects and penetrates the different estates. Luther describes this "law of love," in strikingly concrete terms:

> If you are a manual laborer, you will find that the Bible has been put in your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools—at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your yardstick or measure—and you will read this statement

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Political Thought, ed. Jesse Covington, Bryan McGraw, and Micah Watson (Lanham: Lexington, 2013), 36.

[42] David S. Caudill, "On Realism's Own 'Hangover' of Natural Law Philosophy: Llewellyn *Avec* Dooyeweerd," in *On Philosophy in American Law*, ed. Francis J. Mootz III (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19.

> inscribed in them. Everywhere you look, it stares at you.... All this is continually crying out to you: "Friend, use me in your relations with your neighbor just as you want your neighbor to use his property in his relations with you."[43]

Luther's vocational vision thus lays a strong foundation for social engagement at all levels.

After the turn in the nineteenth century we see the expression of a kind of pseudo-Lutheran quietism and theological liberalism. This degeneration of received Lutheran teaching manifests in a rigid separation between the two realms, spiritual and secular. In the civil realm justice is still the norm, but because of this separation there is no valid basis for religious engagement of political questions or authorities. Bonhoeffer describes this ethical view in this way: "Christian life consists of my living in the world and like the world, my not being any different from it, my not being permitted to be different from it—for the sake of grace!—but my going occasionally from the sphere of the world to the sphere of the church, in order to be reassured there of the forgiveness of my sins."[44]

Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Luther was one of the earliest and best attempts to overcome the quietist, dualist, and secularist degeneration of Lutheran theology. For Bonhoeffer, as for Luther, vocation is secular only insofar as we are called to work in the world. He writes, "A Christian's secular vocation receives new recognition from the gospel only to the extent that it is carried on while following Jesus."[45] Without this foundational commitment to Jesus, the Christian would be no different from the non-Christian occupying a place of authority in the civil realm. Like Luther too, Bonhoeffer was concerned not only to articulate a doctrine of vocation that was concerned with clerical

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[43] LW 21:237.

[44] DBWE 4:50-51.

[45] DBWE 4:49.

callings, but also with the common life and work of humankind. He asks and attempts to answer, "What could the call to follow Jesus mean today for the worker, the businessman, the farmer, or the soldier?"[46]

Where Bonhoeffer develops Luther's thought in a qualitative way is specifically on the question of the three estates: the family, the church, and the civil government. For Bonhoeffer, as we have seen, there are instead four estates or mandates: marriage/family, church, government, and work/culture. This latter category is added to the three received from Luther. In Bonhoeffer work and culture are apportioned their own sphere, on equal ethical footing with the other institutions. In this way, Bonhoeffer develops a more comprehensive social ethical framework than appeared in Luther. While each of Luther's spheres had economic and cultural significance, it was left to Bonhoeffer to develop a formal and independent mandate for culture. There is an irony of history that the sphere that was missing in Luther's articulation, the economic/cultural, is precisely the one that in the modern world is most commonly associated with vocation.

Bonhoeffer's development of social thought with respect to work and culture allows him to articulate a doctrine of labor, work, culture, and service that does not exist in a secular vacuum, but is dynamically related both to the other mandates (horizontally) and to God (vertically). In the previous explorations of each of these mandates in their respective chapters we have examined in some depth the potential for Bonhoeffer's doctrine to inform contemporary ethical thought. There are other dynamics that are worth highlighting in each of these mandates, however, as illustrative of the variety of constructive possible applications of Bonhoeffer's thought.

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[46] DBWE 4:39.

In the case of family and marriage, for instance, Bonhoeffer's construal of the image of God as involving an *analogia relationis* (analogy of relation) rather than simply a traditional *analogia entis* (analogy of being) can be understood to helpfully highlight the fundamental sociality of the human person. Thus, writes Bonhoeffer, the analogy of relation "is therefore the relation which God has established, and it is analogia only in this relation which God has established. The relation of creature with creature is a relation established by God, because it consists of freedom and freedom comes from God."[47] Barth finds this construction helpful and integrates it into his own thought.[48] The *analogia relationis* should be understood not as simply limited to the male/female relationship of husband and wife, but to apply to the diversity of human relationship that is prefigured in the relationships between husband and wife, father, mother, and child. The connection between bodily union and procreation is thus a generative and overflowing relationship of love that bears fruit leading to the development of all kinds of various social relationships.

With respect to the economy, we have seen how Bonhoeffer's development of the doctrine of vocation in terms of vicarious representative action can function as an aid to instantiating a temporal economy of grace. If we understand each person we interact with as representing the work and self-donation of others offered for our service, the proper response is gratitude and reciprocity. While the idea of "economy of gratuity" and "economy of communion" has largely been explored from within the Roman Catholic

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[47] DBWE 3:65-66.

[48] See, for instance, CD III/1:195, 201. Barr criticizes this interpretation of the biblical text, however. See Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, 156-172.

moral tradition, Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the underlying realities of grace and vocation provide resources for developing these ideas from Protestant perspectives.[49]

Bonhoeffer's prioritization of the church throughout his career, including the biographical turn toward the church from the academy, places a needed emphasis on the unique role of the institutional church. In a contemporary developed world that increasingly identifies as "spiritual" but not "religious," Bonhoeffer's work provides insight into how to express and embody an authentic spiritual life and relativize the trappings of religion. Andrew Root, for instance, writes that Bonhoeffer "is the forefather to those taking the *theological* turn in youth ministry."[50]

The balanced emphasis on the positive role of government as an ordering power and upholder of justice is a perspective that is sorely needed today. Bonhoeffer rightly emphasizes that it is possible to have *too little* government just as it is possible to have *too much* government. In doing so, Bonhoeffer charts a path forward between the twin errors of atomistic and anarchistic individualism and tyrannical and monistic collectivism. That the state is neither to be worshiped nor condemned is a perennially necessary corrective to the common human corruptions of political life.

Bonhoeffer's emphasis on coherently reconciling the need both for dynamic vitality and reliable stability in his Christological grounding of natural law represents another significant strength of his ethical approach. Bonhoeffer articulates the deep insight that in the ultimate analysis God's will and the grain of the created order are not at odds.

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[49] See, for instance, Benedict XVI, encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009), 38, 46.

[50] Andrew Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 8

Christ has a role in both creation as well as redemption, and even though there can be tensions in our understanding, these two activities are to be understood as complementary rather than antagonistic.

A further strength of Bonhoeffer's ethical though is closely related, and it is his pervasive Christological focus. Luther's sacramental confession concerning Christ, "This man is God; this God is man," is a leading theme in Bonhoeffer's thought.[51] Bonhoeffer's theology is thoroughly oriented to and normed by Christ. This is a strength because it keeps theological formulations concretized in the historical person of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer is consistently opposed to abstract theorizing, rationalizations that ultimately seek to domesticate and control God: "God did not become an idea, a principle, a program, a universally valid belief, or a law; God became human."[52]

This christocentric focus can also be a weakness, however, as it can function as a cover for more definite formulations and definitive statements. The mystery of the God-man's incarnation can sometimes be invoked as a way to obscure rather than illuminate. The christocentrism of much modern theology can sometimes appear to be more like an empty mantra than a meaningful theologoumenon.[53] The danger that Couenhoven identifies in the case of Barth might apply equally well to Bonhoeffer: "Barth's Christological conception of human nature might, again, be thought to flatten out the story he tells about human history, opening the door for a rebranded Christo-monistic

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[51] LW 36:35; See also DBWE 12:318.

[52] DBWE 6:99

[53] See Richard A. Muller, "A Note on 'Christocentrism' and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 2 (2006): 253-260.

natural law theory that locates a static and unchanging template for human nature in the incarnate Word."[54] Even Christ can be turned into an abstraction by finite and fallible human theologians.

As inspiring and dynamic as Bonhoeffer's thought can be, it also must be acknowledged that there are deep tensions, and even antinomies, in his thought. We have seen some of these in his attempts to reconcile and transcend theological problems inherited from earlier theological traditions. His *Ethics* was left unfinished, and attempts to fully systematize and order the disparate pieces is a seemingly impossible task. One of the results is that those who take Bonhoeffer and his legacy seriously can come to such radically divergent and mutually inconsistent readings of him, and yet each can have at least some superficial textual warrant. This does not mean that there are not better and worse interpretations and appropriations of Bonhoeffer, but it does mean that the fragmentary and unfinished nature of his mature work leaves an unavoidable margin of tentativeness with which our conclusions must be held.

I have tried to show how Bonhoeffer attempted to articulate a vigorous approach to Christian ethics that does justice to both special revelation and created reality. At a number of points Bonhoeffer explicitly rejects "natural law" as a possible basis for Protestant ethical reflection. In spite of these kinds of seemingly definitive statements, I maintain that it is not only plausible but is actually the best available understanding of Bonhoeffer's project to construe it as a Christologically grounded, formed, and oriented understanding of natural law. Bonhoeffer himself leaves open the possibility: "We secure firm ground under our feet only by the biblical grounding of government in Jesus Christ. If and to

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[54] Couenhoven, "Karl Barth's Eschatological (rejection of) Natural Law," 45.

what extent then from this standpoint a new natural law can be found is a theological question that remains open."[55] For Bonhoeffer, we might understand "the gospel as the end of ethics (end of law)."[56] And likewise, for Bonhoeffer Christ is the end, fulfillment, and lord of the natural law. This is a perspective that can serve to revitalize Protestant ethics and fruitfully lead us into engagement with contemporary and future challenges as faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

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[55] DBWE 16:512-513.

[56] DBWE 11:336.

THESES

Dissertation

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ethical thought is best understood as a Christological form of natural law.
2. Vicarious representative action as articulated by Bonhoeffer is a faithful development and extension of Luther's doctrine of vocation.
3. Bonhoeffer's inclusion of a mandate concerning culture and work is an improvement over the Reformation-era understanding of the three estates.
4. Bodily union and procreation are inseparably foundational purposes for marriage.
5. Bonhoeffer was not a pacifist. Corol. Stanley Hauerwas is not a reliable interpreter of Bonhoeffer.
6. Even Christ can be turned into an abstraction by finite and fallible human theologians.
7. *Freedom-for* requires some degree of *freedom-from*, but *freedom-from* without *freedom-for* is self-defeating.
8. Atomistic individualism and totalitarian collectivism are two sides of the same coin.

Coursework

1. Christians have a single calling with various aspects.
2. Given the assumptions of possible world models in analytic philosophy, God must create a world.
3. The Canons of Dordt represent a position consistent with Luther's view as articulated in *De servo arbitrio*.
4. Subsidiarity can be understood as Ockham's razor applied to social philosophy.
5. Economics without morality becomes destructive, while ethical deliberation without economic sensitivity also becomes destructive.
6. The limits of Max Weber's theological insight are demonstrated by the fact that John Wesley could rightly be considered the apotheosis of the Protestant work ethic.
7. "What God has joined together let no one separate" applies to body/soul union as well as to marriage.

8. Academics in general ought to be more humble about acknowledging the methodological limits of their disciplines.
9. Inequality is both the basis of society and the source of social injustice.
10. The common good has to be pursued indirectly.
11. Profit is normally a sign that a genuine service has been rendered.

Whatevers

1. Truth is stronger than wine, a king, or a woman.
2. Strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government.
3. Gordie Howe is the greatest hockey player to ever play the game.
4. "Self-interest" is better understood as the interests *of* the self rather than simply interest *in* the self.
5. Schrödinger's cat knows whether it is alive or dead.
6. Diogenes of Sinope was both a knave and a sage.
7. Measuring GDP tends to promote the division of labor and is a poor proxy for human welfare.
8. Canons are those things you use to blow bad doctrine out of the water.
9. Invoking the positive/normative distinction is itself a normative act.
10. The moral constitution of a people is more determinative of a society's health than the written constitution of the government.

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