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THE RAISING OF THE QUESTION OF THE
NON-RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION OF BIBLICAL
CONCEPTS BY DIETRICH BONHOEFFER AND THE
ATTEMPTS OF PAUL VAN BUREN AND HARVEY COX
TO ANSWER THE QUESTION

By

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A Thesis

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unstintingly to type
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
INTRODUCTION		vi
A. The Subject		vii
1. The Subject Stated and Explained		vii
2. The Subject Justified.		vii
B. The Sources for the Study		viii
C. The Method of Procedure		ix
PART I: THE RAISING OF THE QUESTION.		1
1. THE LIFE BEHIND THE QUESTION		2
A. Introduction		3
B. Self-Discipline		4
C. Action		6
D. Suffering		10
E. Death		12
F. Summary		14
11. THE LOGIC BEHIND THE QUESTION		15
A. Introduction		16
B. Theological Influences.		17
C. Theological Theme		19
D. The Theme Developed		22
1. Christ as Community.		23
2. Christ as Lord of the Church		28
3. Christ as Lord of the World.		31
E. Summary		35
111. THE QUESTION AND FRAGMENTARY ANSWERS.		37
A. Introduction		38
B. This-Worldliness.		39
C. The Non-Religious Interpretation.		40
D. A World Come of Age		45
E. Participation in the Sufferings of God.		49
F. Summary		53

Chapter	Page
PART II: ATTEMPTS AT ANSWERING THE QUESTION . .	54
IV. PAUL VAN BUREN AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS	55
A. Introduction	56
B. Linguistic Analysis.	58
C. Theology	61
D. Jesus of Nazareth.	64
E. Secular Meanings	66
F. Comparison with Bonhoeffer	68
G. Summary	70
V. HARVEY COX AND THE SECULAR CITY.	72
A. Introduction	73
B. Secularization	74
C. The Secular City	79
1. Its Shape	79
2. Its Style	79
3. The Church in the Secular City.	80
D. God and the Secular Man.	81
1. Speaking of God as a Sociological Problem	82
2. Speaking of God as a Political Issue.	83
3. Speaking of God as a Theological Question.	84
E. Comparison with Bonhoeffer	85
1. The Secular	85
2. The Demonic	86
3. The Transcendent.	87
F. Summary	89
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	90
A. Overall Summary.	91
B. Conclusion	94
BIBLIOGRAPHY	95
A. Books.	96
B. Articles and Periodicals	97
C. Unpublished Material	100

INTRODUCTION

THE RAISING OF THE QUESTION OF THE
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ATTEMPTS OF PAUL VAN BUREN AND HARVEY COX
TO ANSWER THE QUESTION

INTRODUCTION

A. The Subject

1. The Subject Stated and Explained

This thesis is an attempt to understand Dietrich Bonhoeffer's raising of the question of the non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts. The study analyzes Bonhoeffer's life in this light and the logic of his theological development which led to his conclusions. His fragmentary answers are also analyzed.

Several men have made attempts to answer Bonhoeffer's question. Two of them are Paul Van Buren and Harvey Cox. Although they are not theologians of Bonhoeffer's stature, a comparison will be attempted to see if they have adequately answered the question.

2. The Subject Justified

John Godsey writes,

...we are faced with the fact that the witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, his life and his writings, is exerting an extraordinary influence on contemporary Christians, not to speak of many people who never darken the door of the church. Moreover, his influence cuts across our customary theological, denominational, national, and age-group divisions. Bonhoeffer has long been avidly read by seminary and college students, but now it is not at all surprising to find one of his books being used as a text for study groups in local congregations.¹

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1. John Godsey, Preface to Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 7.

Godsey gives four reasons for his significance:

1. Bonhoeffer understands our world.
2. Bonhoeffer discerns the universal meaning of Jesus Christ.
3. Bonhoeffer recalls the church to discipleship.
4. Bonhoeffer's life gives power to his words.²

An understanding of Bonhoeffer is therefore essential for every minister of the gospel today. And since a great deal of attention is focused upon Bonhoeffer's non-religious emphasis a thorough grasp of his fragmentary ideas seen in the context of his whole life is fundamental.

Two books have recently been published, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel by Paul van Buren and The Secular City by Harvey Cox. Both are attempts to answer Bonhoeffer's question. Both have influenced the thought of a considerable number of people, particularly the latter. Therefore a comparison between these two men and Bonhoeffer would seem reasonable. It is the writer's contention that not a few people have misinterpreted Bonhoeffer.

B. The Sources for the Study

The main sources for this study are the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel by Paul van Buren, and The Secular City by Harvey Cox. Also significant is The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by John D. Godsey and The Place of Bonhoeffer, edited by Martin E. Marty. In addition several articles and periodicals are noteworthy. The bibliography is fairly comprehensive and provides a beginning

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2. Ibid., pp. 7,11,15,20.

for further study. Much more is presently being written on the subject so that it is possible that a number of pertinent books and articles have been omitted. It is almost impossible to include all of them for this brief thesis.

C. The Method of Procedure

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part I analyzes Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his raising of the question of the non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts. Part II analyzes two attempts at answering Bonhoeffer's question. The first attempt is by Paul van Buren and the second is by Harvey Cox. The chapters will be as follows:

Chapter one is a brief portrayal of the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Particular emphasis is placed upon those factors which led to his non-religious question. Bonhoeffer's life is an expression of his ideas. Therefore an understanding of his life is essential to a full understanding of his raising of the question.

Chapter two examines the theological background out of which Bonhoeffer's question arose. It includes those factors that had the greatest influence upon his mind. It is also an attempt to understand the basic theme, which began early in his thinking, and the development of that theme.

Chapter three analyzes Bonhoeffer's question and the fragmentary answers he provided which have so powerfully influenced theological thought today. It includes his interpretation of

the term "religion," his ideas of "a world come of age," and other factors related to his non-religious viewpoint.

Chapter four begins Part II. It is an attempt to analyze Paul Van Buren's answer to Bonhoeffer's question. Attention will be centered upon his book, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel.

Chapter five is similar to chapter four in approach. It is an analysis of Harvey Cox's attempt to answer Bonhoeffer's question. The Secular City will provide the basis for Cox's thought.

Each of these chapters begins with a brief introduction and ends with a summary. At the end of the entire study, an overall summary is given followed by a brief conclusion. A bibliography is also included.

PART I

THE RAISING OF THE QUESTION

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE BEHIND THE QUESTION

CHAPTER I
THE LIFE BEHIND THE QUESTION

A. Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in Breslau on February 4th, 1906. He died on April 9th, 1945 in a Nazi concentration camp at the age of 39. As a relatively young man his life literally fulfilled his now famous words, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."¹ For Bonhoeffer, however, death was simply life's final station on the way to freedom. On the very day before his expected execution he drew a fellow-prisoner aside and said, "This is the end; for me the beginning of life."² Little did he know how true this statement would be. For he is very much alive and in our midst today. Martin Marty says that Bonhoeffer could well be nominated "the theologian of the age of displacement."³ ✓ Scores of men are seeking today to grasp the significance of Bonhoeffer's thought for they see in it a message for modern secular men.

What led him to raise the question of the non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts? Let us look at the man himself to find an answer. Then we will study his thought to see the logic behind his question.

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1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, translated by R. H. Fuller, (New York:Macmillan, 1959), p. 73.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Prisoner for God, edited by Eberhard Bethge, translated by Reginald H. Fuller, (New York:Macmillan, 1959), p. 12.
3. Martin E. Marty, The Place of Bonhoeffer, edited and introduced by Martin E. Marty, with Peter Berger and others, (New York: Association Press), p. 12.

Bonhoeffer's life can be looked at in four stages. They follow very much the pattern of his now famous "Stations on the Way to Freedom." The four stations are as follows:

B. SELF DISCIPLINE

If you set out to seek freedom, you must learn before all things Mastery over sense and soul, lest your wayward desirings, Lest your undisciplined members lead you now this way, now that way. Chaste be your mind and your body, and subject to you and obedient, Serving solely to seek their appointed goal and objective. None learns the secret to freedom save only by way of control.⁴

Self-discipline was a part of Bonhoeffer's life from its early beginnings. Undoubtedly this was instilled into him by his parents. He had a goodly heritage.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was...the son of a university professor and leading authority on psychiatry and neurology. His more remote ancestors were theologians, professors, lawyers, artists. From his mother's side there was also some aristocratic blood in his veins. His parents, who are still living, are quite outstanding in character and general outlook. They are very clear-sighted, cultured people and uncompromising in all things which matter in life. From his father, Dietrich Bonhoeffer inherited goodness, fairness, self-control, and ability; from his mother, his great human understanding and sympathy, his devotion to the cause of the oppressed, and his unshakable steadfastness.⁵

Academic discipline began early for Bonhoeffer. At the age of twenty-one he received his doctorate in theology from the University of Berlin. Karl Barth called his doctoral dissertation Sanctorum Communio "a theological miracle."⁶ Shortly thereafter Bonhoeffer studied for one year at Union Seminary in New York. Reinhold Niebuhr wrote:

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4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, edited by Eberhard Bethge, (New York:Macmillan), p.xii.
5. Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p.9.
6. John D. Godsey, The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, (Philadelphia:Westminster Press) p.21.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer came to Union Seminary as an exchange student in the academic year of 1929-30. He was at that time a brilliant and theologically sophisticated young man....⁷

But Bonhoeffer was not interested in theology as a purely academic discipline. He was interested in concrete life. A letter from Spain dated August 7, 1928 hints at his trend of thought.

(Bonhoeffer was appointed as an assistant minister to the German-speaking church in Spain during the period 1928-9).

I'm getting to know new people every day; here one meets people as they are, away from the masquerade of the 'Christian world', people with passions, criminal types, little people with little ambitions, little desires and little sins, all in all people who feel homeless in both senses of the word, who loosen up if one talks to them in a friendly way, real people; I can say that I have gained the impression that it is just these people who are much more under grace than under wrath, and that it is the Christian world which is more under wrath than under grace.

'I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me...and to a nation that did not call my name I said, "Here am I."⁸

Theology must be concrete. If it is not, then it is totally irrelevant and must be discarded. His concern for concreteness was greatly enhanced by the real struggle his church was involved in against the rising tide of National Socialism. On January 14, 1945 he wrote the following to his older brother, a professor of physics:

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7. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, 1, No.3 (March 1946), p.3.
8. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, Volume 1 edited and introduced by Edwin H. Robertson, translated by Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden, (London:Collins), p.37.

It may be that I appear to you somewhat fanatical and crazy. Sometimes I am afraid of it myself. But I know, if I were more sensible, I would have to throw in my whole theology the next day, if I were honest, that is. As I began to study theology I had quite a different idea about it. It was then somewhat of an academic affair. And now it became something quite different. But I believe I know finally that at last this one time I found the right track for the first time in my life. And this many times makes me very happy. Only I am always afraid, that out of being scared of what other people think, I will fail to go ahead and get stuck. I believe I know that I would find genuine clarity within myself and would be really sincere, if I began to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously. Here is the only source of power that one day will blow up this ghastliness (meaning the confusion in the church that was created by the insecurity and diversity of opinion about National Socialism). The Sermon on the Mount will blow it up till from all this firework we will have only a few burnt out remainders. The reestablishment of the church will certainly come out of a new form of monastic life that will have only one thing in common with the old one, namely the uncompromising way of life in the discipleship of Christ that is in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount.⁹

The discipline of study and the discipleship of obedience were central in Bonhoeffer's life. It might be said that his life was "...an attempt to understand the revelancy of the Sermon on the Mount for our day and to obey it."¹⁰ This eventually forced him to face the non-religious question.

C. ACTION

Do and dare what is right, not swayed by the whim of the moment. Bravely take hold of the real, not dallying now with what might be. Not in the flight of ideas but only in action is freedom. Make up your mind and come out into the tempest of living. God's command is enough and your faith in Him to sustain you. Then at last freedom will welcome your spirit amid great rejoicing.¹¹

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9. Walter Hartmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer - The Man, A Lecture to the Student Body of Biblical Seminary during the 1964-65 Academic Year, p.2. (Mimeographed).

10. Ibid.

11. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p.xii.

On July 18, 1944, Bonhoeffer wrote,

...faith is always something whole, an act involving the whole life.¹²

He lived what he wrote. For his was a life of action in response to the call of God.

Who stands his ground? Only the man whose ultimate criterion is not his reason, his principles, his conscience, his freedom or his virtue, but who is ready to sacrifice all these things when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and exclusive obedience to God. The responsible man seeks to make his whole life a response to the question and call of God.¹³

Two concrete acts of obedience stand out. One might say that they served as concrete steps leading him to his non-religious question. The first step led him back to Germany to become the head of an underground seminary. The second led him to become a political conspirator.

In October of 1933 Bonhoeffer left Germany to become the pastor of two German-speaking congregations in London. This he did for several reasons, not the least of which was the fact that

...Bonhoeffer's...theological thinking was in a state of flux. His emphasis was shifting from dogmatics to simple Bible exegesis, and he was becoming more and more concerned with the ethical demands of the Sermon on the Mount and what it means to be a disciple of Christ.¹⁴

While in England Bonhoeffer became very much interested in Ghandi and his nonviolence method of pacifism. His interest reached the point where preparations were in the making for a visit to India in early 1935. A letter to his grandmother indicated his intentions.

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12. Bonhoeffer, Prisoner for God, p.167.

13. Ibid., p.15.

14. Godsey, op.cit., p.86.

Before I tie myself down somewhere in a final way I would like to go to India. I have studied the problems there thoroughly and I think that one can learn things there that are very important. Anyway, it sometimes looks as if there might be more Christianity among those so-called 'pagans' as in our whole 'Reichs' church. Actually Christianity comes from the Orient and we have so westernized it and have so adapted it to our civilization that we have lost of it as much as is now obvious.¹⁵

Before he could make the journey however, he received a call from the Confessing Church in Germany to take over the leadership of an "illegal" underground seminary for training pastors. His decision was not taken lightly. An acquaintance of his said of his decision:

I shall always remember him pacing up and down our lounge trying to decide whether to remain here or to give up his church here and return to the persecuted church in Germany; longing to visit Ghandi and India and feeling a premonition that unless he seized that moment he would never go. I knew, being himself, how he must eventually decide.¹⁶

Bonhoeffer left London, dropped his Indian plans and returned to a difficult and dangerous situation in Germany. On April 26, 1935 he met with twenty-five students to begin this new phase of his life. The seminary later became established at Finkenwalde. Out of this experience came two of his best known books, The Cost of Discipleship, (1937), and Life Together, (1939). Here a communal life was established that took seriously Christ's call to discipleship. Inner renewal and concrete commitment to responsibility were central. But after two and one half years, Heinrich Himmler, Hitler's Chief of the Secret Police ordered the Finkenwalde seminary to be disbanded.

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15. Hartmann, op.cit.,p.4.

16. Godsey, op.cit.,p.87.

The first step had been taken. Bonhoeffer responded in active obedience to the call of the Confessing Church which he interpreted as being the call of Christ. He sought to fulfill Christ's commands within the church.

Then in July of 1939 Bonhoeffer was due for military service. His conscience however forbade him from taking part in the war as a soldier. Therefore arrangements were made for him to leave Germany. Reinhold Niebuhr was instrumental in his receiving an invitation to lecture and teach in the United States. After four weeks in the United States he knew he had made a mistake. In a letter to Niebuhr he said:

Sitting here in Dr. Coffin's (then president of Union Seminary) garden I have had the time to think and to pray about my situation and that of my nation and to have God's will for me clarified. I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people. My brothers in the Confessional Synod wanted me to go. They may have been right in urging me to do so; but I was wrong in going. Such a decision each man must make for himself. Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing that victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security.¹⁷

We know the choice he made. He returned to Germany and became party to a conspiracy to kill Hitler. Here he came into "contact with completely 'secular' men who were willing to suffer and even to die for their fellow men."¹⁸ Earlier he was as Niebuhr wrote:

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17. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Death of a Martyr", Christianity and Crisis, 5, No. 11 (June 25, 1945), p. 6.

18. Godsey, op.cit., p. 263.

"inclined to regard political questions as completely irrelevant to the life of faith. But as the Nazi evil rose he became more and more its uncompromising foe."¹⁹ Bethge wrote,

Through his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi he was able to have a glimpse behind the scenes of the crisis which centered on General von Fritsch, and of the plans for overthrowing the Nazi government which were associated with General Beck. Hitherto Bonhoeffer, under the influence of his American and English experiences, had been very near to absolute pacifism - an unheard-of position in the Germany of that time. Now he began to see pacifism as an illegitimate escape, especially if he was tempted to withdraw from his increasing contacts with the responsible political and military leaders of the resistance. He no longer saw any escape into some region of piety.²⁰

He therefore cut himself off from the Confessing Church since he felt that it was concerned too much with its own existence and therefore failing to accept its responsibilities in and for the world. The second step had been taken. Bonhoeffer followed Christ "outside the camp" and into the non-religious world. He acted responsibly for the sake of Christ and for the sake of all mankind. This led him to the station of suffering.

D. SUFFERING

See what a transformation! These hands so active and powerful
Now are tied, and alone and fainting, you see where your work ends.
Yet you are confident still, and gladly commit what is rightful
Into a stronger hand, and say that you are contented.
You were free for a moment of bliss, then you yielded your freedom
Into the hand of God, that He might perfect it in glory.²¹

.....

19. Niebuhr, op.cit., "The Death of a Martyr", p.6.

20. Bonhoeffer, Prisoner for God, p.8.

21. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p.xii.

While in prison Bonhoeffer's non-religious question began taking its final and fragmentary form. The station of suffering gave him time to think. He never regretted his past action.

Nor have I ever regretted my decision in the summer of 1939, and strange as it may seem, I am convinced that my life has followed a straight and even course...²²

In prison he found himself drawn more and more to the religionless man.

I often ask myself why a Christian instinct frequently draws me more to the religionless than to the religious, by which I mean not with any intention of evangelizing them, but rather, I might almost say, in "brotherhood." While I often shrink with religious people from speaking of God by name - because that Name somehow seems to me here not to ring true, and I strike myself as rather dishonest (it is especially bad when others start talking in religious jargon; then I dry up completely and feel somehow oppressed and ill at ease) - with people who have no religion I am able on occasion to speak of God quite openly and as it were naturally.²³

Upon hearing of the failure of the attempt to assassinate Hitler on the previous day, Bonhoeffer wrote on July 21, 1944:

During the last year or so I have come to appreciate the 'worldliness' of Christianity as never before. The Christian is not a 'homo religiosus,' but a man pure and simple, just as Jesus was man, compared with John the Baptist anyhow. I don't mean the shallow this-worldliness of the enlightened, of the busy, the comfortable or the lascivious. It is something much more profound than that, something in which the knowledge of death and resurrection is ever present. I believe Luther lived a this-worldly life in this sense. I remember talking to a young French pastor at A. thirteen years ago. We were discussing what our real purpose was in life. He said he would like to become a saint. I think it is quite likely he did become one. At that time I was very much impressed, though I disagreed with him and said I should prefer to have faith, or words to that effect. For a long time I did not realize how far we were apart.

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22. Bonhoeffer, Prisoner for God, p. 119.

23. Ibid., pp. 123, 124.

I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. It was in this phase that I wrote The Cost of Discipleship. Today I can see the dangers of this book, though I am prepared to stand by what I wrote. Later I discovered and am still discovering up to this very moment that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to believe. One must abandon every attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, a converted sinner, a churchman (the priestly type, so-called!) a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. This is what I mean by worldliness - taking life in one's stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its experiences and helplessness. It is in such a life we throw ourselves utterly in the arms of God and participate in his sufferings in the world and watch with Christ in Gethsemane. That is faith, that is 'metanoia', and that is what makes a man a Christian (cf. Jeremish 46). How can success make us arrogant or failure lead us astray, when we participate in the sufferings of God by living in this world?²⁴

Bonhoeffer wrote this when he knew death awaited him. It is evident that his faith was forged in the furnace of concrete life. He suffered and saw in that suffering the very essence of Christianity. He was a Christian, and therefore a man - a man of the world. One final station now stood between Bonhoeffer and freedom.

C. DEATH

Come now, lightest of feasts on the way to freedom eternal,
Death, strike off the fetters, break down the walls that oppress us,
Our bedazzled soul and our ephemeral body,
That we may see at last the sight which here was not vouchsafed us.
Freedom, we sought you long in discipline, action, suffering,
Now as we die we see you and know you at last, face to face.²⁵

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24. Ibid., p.168.

25. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p.xii.

On April 9, 1945 Bonhoeffer attained his goal. Three days before Allied troops liberated his prison he was executed by the Nazis. He missed earthly liberation by three days and thereby gained eternal freedom. The words of the angels to the women at the tomb of Jesus come to mind, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Bonhoeffer is alive. He is not dead. His letter of July 21, 1944 concludes by saying,

Goodbye. Take care of yourself and don't lose hope-we shall all meet again soon.²⁶

A fellow prisoner, Payne Best, in his book The Venlo

Incident writes:

Bonhoeffer...was all humility and sweetness, he always seemed to me to diffuse an atmosphere of happiness, of joy in every smallest event of life, and of deep gratitude for the mere fact that he was alive.... He was one of the very few men that I have ever met to whom his God was real and close to him.... The following day, Sunday 8th April, 1945, Pastor Bonhoeffer held a little service and spoke to us in a manner which reached the hearts of all, finding just the right words to express the spirit of our imprisonment and the thoughts and resolutions which it had brought. He had hardly finished his last prayer when the door opened and two evil-looking men in civilian clothes came and said: "Prisoner Bonhoeffer, get ready to come with us." Those words, "come with us" - for all prisoners they had come to mean one thing only-the scaffold. We bade him good-bye - he drew me aside - "This is the end," he said. "For me the beginning of life,".... Next day, at Flossenbug he was hanged.²⁷

Reinhold Niebuhr writes,

The life and death of Bonhoeffer belongs to annals of Christian martyrdom. His career is....a challenge to humility for all of us who have paid no such price for our Christian loyalty.²⁸

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26. Bonhoeffer, Prisoner for God, p. 169.

27. Ibid., pp. 11,12.

28. Niebuhr, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," p. 3.

F. SUMMARY

Bonhoeffer was not an ivory tower theologian. His thoughts were shaped by his real life. The concrete world forced him to raise the non-religious question. He could not escape it without being dishonest with himself.

His life followed the pattern of his "Stations on the Way to Freedom." Discipline, action, suffering, and death - these express his life. Each station drove him further from religion; each station drove him further into the world of religionless Christianity. The final station left us with fragmentary answers. For Bonhoeffer it meant freedom.

CHAPTER II

THE LOGIC BEHIND THE QUESTION

CHAPTER II

THE LOGIC BEHIND THE QUESTION

A. Introduction

Some people are concerned that Bonhoeffer's final thoughts are a radical departure from his earlier thoughts. This is particularly true since he has become a kind of "patron saint" for all types of "God is dead" theology. But in spite of the apparent discontinuity there appears to be an inner consistency and a logical development to his thoughts. William O. Fennell writes,

A debate continues in theological circles about whether what Bonhoeffer wrote in his letters...represents a break with or an extension of his earlier thought. He himself suggests that he was breaking new ground. He wrote to his friend: "You would be surprised and perhaps disturbed if you knew how my ideas on theology were taking shape." However, it is our conviction that there is an inner consistency in his theological development despite the new, and at first glance startling notions which appear for the first time in his letters. Such ideas as "the world having come of age," "the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts," "the this-worldly character of the Christian faith," could not have been anticipated perhaps by those who knew his former writings. But in these ideas Bonhoeffer believed he was finding a corrective balance, and a movement toward wholeness, in his Christian thinking - and not a contradiction.¹

We shall attempt therefore to find the logic behind Bonhoeffer's question. What led him to his conclusions? The chapter will be divided into three parts followed by a summary. The first will analyze the theological influences upon his thought. The second will analyze the basic theme of Bonhoeffer's thought. The third will analyze the development of that theme.

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1. William O. Fennell, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Man of Faith in a World Come of Age," Canadian Journal of Theology, 8, no. 2, (July, 1962), p. 173.

B. THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

At the age of six, Bonhoeffer moved to a suburb of Berlin with his family. Here he grew up in the atmosphere of German liberal theology.

The children of the neighborhood with whom he played and "made music" (he played the piano skillfully) were those of Adolf von Harnack, the great scholar, and Hans Debruck, the historian.²

At the age of sixteen his mind was clearly made up - he would study theology. He began his general studies in Tübingen where he studied for one year. The principal influences upon him were Adolf Schlatter and Karl Heim.

Schlatter rooted the young theologian in the Bible. The clearest indication of Schlatter's influence can be seen in Bonhoeffer's copies of his works. Nearly all of them are thick with marginal annotation. Clearly, he went back to Schlatter every time he prepared a sermon or biblical exegesis. Eberhard Bethge who possesses these volumes, confirms this. Another voice at Tübingen was that of Karl Heim. Of course, Bonhoeffer listened to it and for a time was influenced. But Heim did not please him, neither as a student, nor in later years.... Heim's influence...did not last, and it was Schlatter's influence which was characteristic of the Tübingen period and endured to the end.³

After Tübingen, Bonhoeffer matriculated in 1924 at the University of Berlin where he completed his education. Here he felt the influence of several men - among them, Adolf von Harnack. Although he disagreed with much of Harnack's liberal thought, Bonhoeffer greatly admired him and was profoundly influenced by him.

Harnack implanted in him his own love of truth and a serious concern with historical fact, and these were to remain with Bonhoeffer throughout his life.⁴

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2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, translated and with an introduction by John W. Doberstein, (New York:Harper, 1954), p.8.
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, Volume 1, edited and introduced by Edwin H. Robertson, translated by Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden, (London:Collins, 1965), p.31.
4. Ibid., p.27.

Other influences were Adolf Deissmann who "grounded him in good biblical scholarship,"⁵ Hans Leitzmann, Ernst Sellin, Karl Holl who "aroused his interest in systematic theology,"⁶ and Reinhold Seeberg. It was with the latter that Bonhoeffer decided to do his work for the degree of licentiate of theology (the equivalent of doctor of theology).

The major influence in Berlin...apart from Harnack's was that of Reinhold Seeberg, Professor of Systematic Theology, with whom Bonhoeffer kept up a continuous correspondence over many years. The later years were clouded, but in these early days in Berlin, Seeberg's influence was considerable. Bonhoeffer's earliest letters are to Seeberg and it was under his guidance that he prepared many papers and eventually defended the...theses publicly, as was the custom for the award of theology.⁷

One more name needs mentioning and that is the name of Karl Barth. Although Bonhoeffer was never officially enrolled as a student of Barth's, Martin Marty says,

The eminent Swiss theologian Karl Barth was in many ways Bonhoeffer's mentor.⁸

He adds,

Bonhoeffer...studied under Harnack, Seeberg, and Leitzmann, though Barth influenced him more profoundly than did they.⁹

In July, 1931, Bonhoeffer made a three-week visit to Bonn, where he met and listened to Prof. Karl Barth. Of this visit John Godsey says,

In letters to his friend Erwin Sutz, of Zurich, the young theologian tells in detail the extraordinary impression made by Barth's open and vigorous personality and his gifted ability as a theologian and teacher. "I believe," writes Bonhoeffer, "I have seldom regretted an omission in my theological past so much as not having come (to hear Barth)

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5. Ibid., p.32.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Martin E. Marty, "Bonhoeffer:Seminarists Theologian", Christian Century, 77, No.16, (April 20,1960), p.467.

9. Ibid.

earlier." This meeting proved to be the beginning of a friendly and stimulating acquaintanceship, which continued through occasional correspondence and personal encounters throughout the remainder of Bonhoeffer's life.¹⁰

But Barth's influence upon Bonhoeffer began before this encounter as Sanctorum Communio indicates. And his influence increased. Edwin Robertson says,

...the full extent of this influence cannot be seen till later a paper, "The Theology of Crisis",...was delivered in 1931 to an American audience in an attempt to explain Barth's theology to them....¹¹

Thus we might say that Bonhoeffer's "theological credentials were impeccable."¹² Schlatter, Harnack, Deissmann, Leitzmann, Sellin Holl, Seeberg, and Barth all shared in influencing him, though Barth proved to be the dominant influence.

C. THEOLOGICAL THEME

We shall now attempt to discover the theme underlying Bonhoeffer's theological development. In doing so we hope to show that Bonhoeffer is both logical and consistent.

Eberhard Bethge, student, friend, and associate of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who has taken upon himself the task of editing and publishing Bonhoeffer's writings says,

If...I were to try to summarize what had been Bonhoeffer's theme, I would suggest "the concreteness of revelation." He made enquiries of that concreteness throughout the two decades of his work as a teacher and as a man of action, and he himself bore testimony to it.¹³

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10. John D. Godsey, The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p.81.
 11. Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, p.33.
 12. Harvey Cox, "Beyond Bonhoeffer", Commonweal, 82, No.21, (Sept.17, 1965), p.654.
 13. Eberhard Bethge, "The Editing and Publishing of the Bonhoeffer Papers", Andover Newton Bulletin, 52, No.2, (Dec.1959), p.20.

Bethge adds,

Bonhoeffer concerned himself with this theme within a framework of thought determined by Karl Barth. But he always went a step further. The early dialectical theologians including Bonhoeffer had asked whether revelation could be understood without removing it from the sphere of God's freedom into that of our control. Bonhoeffer went further and asked: How can revelation be understood so that its very preciousness is preserved by the fact that its tangibility, its self-disclosure, is apparent? While other dialectical theologians thought of the sovereignty of revelation as gloriously manifest in its freedom and its intangibility, Bonhoeffer, quite after Lutheran fashion, thought of it as apparent in its self-disclosure. Bonhoeffer differed from the other dialectical theologians of those years in his emphasis on the "finitum capax infiniti."¹⁴

Bonhoeffer's emphasis upon "the concreteness of revelation" was so pronounced that it led Karl Barth in 1936 to write to Bonhoeffer:

You would not expect me to view what is happening in any other way than frankly and with some concern....Especially among the young men of today in the Confessional Church, I see a bigger wave of this sort approaching. (Barth's reference here is to the abandonment of the original Christology and eschatological faith of dialectical theology in favor of some kind of action man himself could take).... It may well be that you are called and fitted to be its spokesman and to give it leadership....¹⁵

John Godsey agrees with Bethge's analysis of Bonhoeffer's theme of concreteness, but adds,

Although Bethge's schema is undeniably true and discloses a motif that is indispensable for a proper understanding of Bonhoeffer, it seems to us that behind this continual demand for the concretion of revelation stands a more basic clue to the development of Bonhoeffer's life and thought, namely the "content" of the revelation itself. It is his Christological concentration, that is, the meditation upon and understanding of the person and work of the living Christ, which accounts for his drive toward concretion. In fact, the Christocentric

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14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

focus and the demand that revelation be concrete are characteristics of Bonhoeffer's theology from the beginning, but it is his understanding of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ which develops and this provides the real clue to the development within his theology itself. It is the ever-increasing apprehension of the implications involved in this Name, the growing awareness of the total meaning of Jesus Christ, which of course is not unrelated to the external events of his own life, that accounts for the different emphasis and the development in Bonhoeffer's theology.¹⁶

For Godsey then, Bonhoeffer's Christological concentration is central. Paul F. W. Busing, one of Bonhoeffer's students at Finkenwalde says,

The greatness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer lies in the fact that he was a Christocentric theologian....¹⁷

Regarding "concreteness", Martin Marty writes,

With Bethge and with Godsey I agree that Bonhoeffer remains par excellence the theologian of the concrete, of the visible and tangible expression of the Holy Spirit's work.¹⁸

Regarding Bonhoeffer's Christological emphasis, Marty says,

Because of his Christology Bonhoeffer was somehow non-religious from the first - even in his writings on discipline and devotion!¹⁹

In Bonhoeffer we see therefore a "growing awareness of the total meaning of Jesus Christ" which accounts for his emphasis upon the concreteness of revelation and as Marty suggests the non-religious element. Godsey says,

The cohesive and elucidative element in the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is his steadfast concentration upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Throughout the continuing development of his theology, as he faced the various situations of his life it was the figure of the

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16. Godsey, op. cit., p. 265.
17. Paul F. W. Busing, "Reminiscences of Finkenwalde," Christian Century, 78, No.38, (Sept. 20, 1961), p. 1111.
18. Marty, "Bonhoeffer:Seminarist Theologian," p. 469.
19. Martin E. Marty, The Place of Bonhoeffer, edited and introduced by Martin E. Marty, with Peter Berger and Others, (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 17.

incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord that captivated his attention and evoked his faithful obedience. For Bonhoeffer theology was essentially Christology, but because Christ is not without his body, Christology includes ecclesiology within itself. This explains Bonhoeffer's insistence that revelation is always concrete revelation. The word of God, Jesus Christ, became not an idea but flesh! God revealed himself in a concrete, historical life, and Bonhoeffer passionately believed that revelation continues to take place only in a concrete form, namely, as Jesus Christ lives and takes form in a concrete community, in his church.²⁰

D. THE THEME DEVELOPED

Godsey suggests that three periods are discernible in Bonhoeffer's theological development. Each is a further unfolding of his comprehension of Christology. The following schema of Godsey's may be oversimplified but it does serve as a good guide to the development of Bonhoeffer's theme.

During the first period his thought centered on Jesus Christ as the revelational reality of the church. During the second period his emphasis was upon Jesus Christ as the Lord over the church. In the third period Bonhoeffer concentrated his attention upon Jesus Christ as the Lord over the world.²¹

Godsey adds,

Of course, it must be admitted from the outset that all these aspects of Christology are to be found in some degree in each period, but the thesis here proposed has this two-fold implication: first, that one of the aspects was dominant in each period, and, second, that each succeeding period represents an expansion of Bonhoeffer's Christological understanding. From this perspective we are able to view the striking contrast between his original emphasis on the church and his final emphasis on the world, not as a break in his theology, but as the two poles of a development.²²

Using Godsey's suggested schema we shall look at Bonhoeffer's theme therefore as it is developed in these three periods.

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20. Godsey, op.cit., p.264.

21. Ibid., p.266.

22. Ibid.

1. Christ as Community

Two books stand out in this first period of Bonhoeffer's thought. They are Sanctorum Communio and Act and Being. His main interest focused upon the relation of Jesus Christ to the sociological phenomenon of the Church. Bethge writes;

At the time he was the only one of the dialectical theologians who had such a concern.²³

Sanctorum Communio was Bonhoeffer's first major work.

Bethge says:

Difficult and overloaded though it is, in many respects unclear and youthful in style, nevertheless it moves clearly across the continental map of theology of that time into new country. It begins from two conflicting bases. First there is the sociological school, which had a powerful effect on Berlin theology of the twenties by way of Troeltsch.... The second base was dialectical theology.... He was attracted by the impossible. What he tried to give in Sanctorum Communio was a sociological theology of the church, or a theological sociology.²⁴

Bonhoeffer insists that man is never alone. He always exists in some form of community.

The individual is not solitary. For the individual to exist, 'others' must also exist.²⁵

He adds,

...the person in his concrete life, wholeness and uniqueness, is willed by God as the ultimate unity. Social relations must therefore be understood as built up interpersonally upon the uniqueness and separateness of persons. The person cannot be surpassed by an a-personal mind, or by any "unity" which might abolish the multiplicity of persons. The basic social category is the I-Thou relation. The Thou of the other man is the divine Thou. So the way to the other man is also the way to the divine Thou, a way of recognition or rejection. In the 'moment' the individual again and again becomes a person through the 'other.' The other man presents us with the same problem of cognition as does God himself. My real relation to the other man is oriented on my relation to God.

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23. Bethge, op. cit., p. 21.

24. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sanctorum Communio, (London:Collins,1963), p. 7.

25. Ibid., p. 31.

But since I first know God's 'I' in the revelation of his love, so too with the other man: here the concept of the church finds its place. Then it will become clear that the Christian person achieves his true nature when God does not confront him as Thou, but 'enters into' him as I.

Hence the individual belongs essentially and absolutely with the other, according to the will of God, even though, or even because, each is completely separate from the other.²⁶

Sociality, or community, is therefore essential for a man to be an individual. And the divine Thou is the Thou of the other man. This hints at Bonhoeffer's concrete view of spirituality. He says:

...man's entire spirituality is interwoven with sociality, and rests upon the basic relation of I and Thou. 'Man's whole spirituality becomes evident only along with others: the essence of spirit is that the self is through being in the other.' The I and the Thou are fitted into one another in infinite nearness, in mutual penetration, forever inseparable, resting on one another, in inmost mutual participation, feeling and experiencing together, and sustaining the general stream of spiritual interaction. Here the openness of personal being is evident.²⁷

Lest it should be supposed that the idea of personal openness turns into that of an a-personal spirit Bonhoeffer makes it clear that "the persons openness requires closedness as its correlate, if we are to be able to speak of openness at all."²⁸ He concludes his discussion of spirituality by saying:

God does not desire a history of individual men, but the history of the community of men. Nor does he desire a community which absorbs the individual into itself, but a community of men. In his sight the community and the individual are present at the same moment, and rest in one another. The structures of the individual and the collective unit are the same. Upon these basic relations rests the concept of the religious community and the church.²⁹

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26. Ibid., pp. 36,37.

27. Ibid., p. 48.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 52.

Bonhoeffer then goes on to discuss the church in this light.

He says:

...the sociological structure of the church in the New Testament view involves a multitude of persons, a community and a unity, all belonging together....³⁰

This community is essentially Jesus Christ.

The sole content of the church is...the revelation of God in Christ. He is present to the church in his Word, by which the community is constituted ever anew. The church is the presence of Christ, as Christ is the presence of God.³¹

Putting it more concretely Bonhoeffer says,

The church is 'Christ existing as the community....'³²

This reality is revealed in the New Testament and is essential to man because of his estrangement due to sin. Bonhoeffer says,

We have to understand the human species in terms of the concept of sin.³³

He adds,

The reality of sin...places the individual in the utmost loneliness, in a state of radical separation from God and man.³⁴

Christ restores the communion of man with God and reestablishes the community of men with each other. This he accomplished through vicarious action. Christ is therefore seen as "the man for others" in the church. Godsey sums up Bonhoeffer's thought;

Thus a concrete community of persons is to be looked upon as a collective person, and this rests upon the principle of representation or substitution, since Christ as the Second Adam bears the guilt and sin of the old humanity unto death on the cross and establishes a New Humanity in his body. In this very act, however, Christ restores

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- 30. Ibid., p.102.
- 31. Ibid., p.101.
- 32. Ibid., p.160.
- 33. Ibid., p.78.
- 34. Ibid., p.106.

the broken fellowship and creates a fellowship of love, which is based upon the life-principle of vicariousness. This is a fellowship...of the Holy Spirit, who in the preaching of the word of justification makes Christ present and so awakens faith and love in the hearts of the hearers. God rules through his word, but the paradoxical fact about God's rulership is that he rules by serving. His will to rule is his will to love, that is, to establish a fellowship of love, so the congregation is at once a means to an end (an instrument of spreading the word of God's sovereign claim) and an end in itself (God claims man precisely for this fellowship of love). The members of the fellowship live "for one another," which means that in their actions they become "like Christ," or, as Luther put it, one becomes a Christ to another.⁵⁵

The concrete theme of "Christ existing as community" continues in Bonhoeffer's second book Act and Being. Martin Marty says,

In his first book Bonhoeffer stood between the sociologists and the theologians; in his second between the philosophers and the theologians.³⁶

He adds,

In Act and Being Bonhoeffer first criticizes the idea of "religious a priori" - as he was to do on a full scale in his last letters. In it he comes close to his most precarious ideas of immanence when he speaks of God as being somehow "haveable, apprehensible, touchable," and material in his church. In it he begins to attack what we might call religiosity on theological and not merely psychological grounds. In it he points to God's transcendence not in a spatial beyond but in God's freedom for man in the concrete life of the Church. The sociological approach to ecclesiology in his first dissertation verges on a sociology of epistemology in the second. True, he has not yet preoccupied himself with seeing God free for man in the world so much as in the Church at this early period, but nothing he could later add would heighten the sense of the concreteness of God's revealing act wherever God chose to veil/unveil himself.³⁷

In one of his most poignant passages Bonhoeffer says,

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35. Godsey, op.cit., p.266.

36. Marty, The Place of Bonhoeffer, p.81.

37. Ibid.

In revelation it is a question less of God's freedom on the far side from us, i.e. his eternal isolation and aseity, than of his forth-proceeding, his given Word, his bond in which he has bound himself, of his freedom as it is most strongly attested in his having placed himself at man's disposal. God is not free of man but for man. Christ is the Word of his freedom. God is there, which is to say: not in eternal non-objectivity but..."haveable", graspable in his Word within the Church.³⁸

The Church therefore is still Bonhoeffer's concern, He says,

The Christian communion is God's final revelation: God as "Christ existing as community", ordained for the rest of time until the end of the world and the return of Christ. It is here that Christ has come very nearest to humanity, here given himself to his new humanity, so that his person enfolds in itself all whom he has won, binding itself in duty to them, and them reciprocating in duty to him. The "Church" therefore has not the meaning of a human community to which Christ is or is not self-superadded, nor of a union among such as individually seek or think to have Christ and wish to cultivate this common "possession"; no, it is a communion created by Christ and founded upon him, one in which Christ reveals himself as...the new man - or rather, the new humanity itself.³⁹

We see in this passage, however, that there is a problem of the relationship of "Christ existing as community" and "Christ in heaven", for if Christ is to return then he must be absent. This problem is overcome by Bonhoeffer in the second period of his thought by his "concentration upon the Lordship of the risen Christ over his body."⁴⁰

But before we move on to that period a quote from Bonhoeffer's "Christology" of 1933 gives evidence of his trend of thought. This was written three years after Act and Being and four years prior to The Cost of Discipleship.

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38. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Act and Being, translated by Bernard Noble, (London:Collins), p.90,91.

39. Ibid,p.121.

40. Godsey,op.cit.,p.267.

Jesus the man becomes God as the object of faith. This happens just because he is man, and not in spite of his humanity or over and above his humanity. Faith is ignited by Jesus the man. Jesus Christ is God, not because of a divine nature, substance, essence, ousia, not in anyway that can be determined and described, but by faith. There is no such thing as a divine essence. If Jesus Christ is to be described as God, we cannot speak of this divine essence, of his omnipotence and omniscience, but only of this weak man among sinners, of his cradle and his cross. This divine essence - the omnipotence and omnipresence - simply does not exist.... If we speak of Jesus Christ as God, we cannot speak of him as the representative of a divine idea who possesses the properties of omniscience and omnipresence. We can only speak of his weakness, of his cradle and cross.... But faith is where a man so surrenders himself to this abased God that he bets his life on him...where he abandons every attempt to give visible assurance of faith....⁴¹

There is no question that as early as 1933 Bonhoeffer was all ready sounding notes that were not fully heard and appreciated until his letters from prison.

2. Christ the Lord of the Church

The Cost of Discipleship stands as Bonhoeffer's most important work during this period. He begins with a cry against so-called "cheap grace" and contrasts such grace with "costly grace."

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without Church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without contrition. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the Cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.⁴²

Costly grace...is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner.⁴³

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41. Bethge, op. cit., p. 16.

42. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, translated by R. H. Fuller, (New York:Macmillan), p. 38.

43. Ibid., p. 39.

The call of "costly grace" is issued to a man by Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus is the Christ, He has the authority to call and to demand obedience to His word. Jesus summons men to follow Him not as a teacher or a pattern of the good life, but as the Christ, the Son of God. Not a word of praise is given to the disciple for obeying the call. We are not expected to contemplate the disciple, but only Him who calls, and His absolute authority....there is no other road to faith or discipleship - only obedience to the call of Jesus.⁴⁴

Jesus Christ is the Lord who calls a man. And that call is a concrete command.

If we would follow Jesus we must take certain definite steps. The first step is to break away from our past. The call to follow at once produces a new situation. Levi must leave the receipt of custom and Peter his nets.⁴⁵

Faith now is possible. For the disciple has been "dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity."⁴⁶ Concrete obedience to our Lord is essential.

It is not for us to choose which way we shall follow. That depends on the will of Christ.⁴⁷

Each man must act alone. But to act alone does not mean that one will remain alone.

Though we all have to enter upon discipleship alone, we do not remain alone. If we take Him at His word and dare to become individuals, our reward is the fellowship of the Church. Here is a visible brotherhood to compensate a hundredfold for all we have lost.⁴⁸

That visible brotherhood, the Church, is Christ's Body. But at the same time that we recognize the Church as Christ's Body we must recognize that Christ is the Lord of the Church.

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44. Ibid., pp. 50, 51.

45. Ibid., p. 54.

46. Ibid., p. 51.

47. Ibid., p. 84.

48. Ibid.

Through His Spirit, the crucified and risen Lord exists as the Church, as the New Man. It is just as true to say that His Body is the New Humanity as to say that He is God Incarnate dwelling in eternity. As the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily, so the Christian believers are filled with Christ.... Indeed, they are themselves that fulness in so far as they are in the Body and in so far as it is He alone who filleth all in all. When we have recognized the unity between Christ and His Body, the Church, we must also hold fast to the complementary truth of Christ's Lordship over the Body. That is why St. Paul, as he comes to develop the theme of the Body of Christ, calls Him the Head of the Body.... This assertion symbolizes and preserves the truth that Christ stands over against His Church. The historical fact in the story of our redemption which makes this truth essential, and rules out any idea of a mystical fusion between Christ and His Church, is the Ascension of Christ (and His Second Coming). The same Christ who is present in His Church will also come again. It is the same Lord and the same Church in both places, and it is one and the same Body, whether we think of His presence on earth or of His coming again on the clouds of heaven. But it makes a great deal of difference whether we are here or there. So it is necessary to give due weight both to the unity of Christ and His Church and to their distinction.⁴⁹

At the same time that Christ exists as the Church, he also transcends the Church. He stands over against His Church as its Lord. As Lord He calls men to acts of concrete obedience. And it is in the concrete life of the new community consisting of obedient men that Christ is known as Lord. That Lordship is expressed concretely. In Life Together written two years after The Cost of Discipleship, Bonhoeffer says,

The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. Visitor and visited in loneliness recognizes in each other the Christ who is present in the body; they receive and meet each other as one meets

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49. Ibid., pp. 186, 187.

the Lord in reverence, humility, and joy. They receive each other's benedictions as the benediction of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁰

Thus far we have seen that Bonhoeffer's chief concern has centered around Christ as the Church and Christ as the Lord of the Church. Bonhoeffer was aware that the emphasis of his second period might be misunderstood. Godsey says:

The chief danger in the second period of Bonhoeffer's theological development is that of turning the gospel of grace into a new law. His sharp polemic against "cheap grace" and his unmitigated emphasis upon obedience might be misinterpreted in the direction of a new legalism, which could lead either to despair or to pride. Bonhoeffer was willing to run the risk, however, because he was convinced that "the word of cheap grace has been the ruin of more Christians than any commandment of works." It seems to us that this danger was overcome in the third period by Bonhoeffer's doctrine of Christian "worldliness," which is a profound exposition of the freedom that comes to those who are obedient, a freedom for a life of genuine worldliness.⁵¹

3. Christ the Lord of the World

Two books are essential for one to understand Bonhoeffer's emphasis during this third period. The first is Ethics, which was published posthumously in 1949 from fragments that were found and collated. The second is Prisoner for God, or as it is now more popularly called in the English edition, Letters and Papers from Prison. Also published posthumously, the latter followed the former by two years.

In this final period Christ is seen not only as Lord of the Church but as Lord of the World. Even the godless world comes under his Lordship. This emphasis of Bonhoeffer's is seen in Ethics in his discussions of "reality," "ultimate and penultimate" and "church and world." In Prisoner for God his non-religious emphasis takes its final form.

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50. Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p. 20.

51. Godsey, op. cit., p. 268.

Bonhoeffer's concept of reality is Christocentric. He says,

...God as the ultimate reality is no other than He who shows forth, manifests and reveals Himself, that is to say, God in Jesus Christ....⁵²

Regarding the Christian ethic, he says,

The Christian ethic speaks in a quite different sense of the reality which is the origin of good, for it speaks of the reality of God as the ultimate reality without and within everything that is. It speaks of the reality of the world as it is, which possesses reality solely through the reality of God.⁵³

He adds,

In Jesus Christ the reality of God entered into the reality of this world. The place where the answer is given, both to the question concerning the reality of the world, is designated solely and alone by the name Jesus Christ. God and the world are comprised in this name. In Him all things consist. Henceforward one can speak neither of God nor of the world without speaking of Jesus Christ.⁵⁴

Consequently,

In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God in the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other. The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world, and when I encounter the reality of the world it is always already sustained, accepted and reconciled in the reality of God. This is the inner meaning of the revelation of God in the man Jesus Christ.... I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world or the reality of the world without the reality of God.⁵⁵

Reality, therefore, is in Christ. The sacred and the secular are not two separate spheres. The whole world is "already sustained, accepted and reconciled." The Christian must therefore profess his faith in the following:

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52. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, edited by Eberhard Bethge, (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 56.

53. Ibid., p. 61.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

...the reality of God and the reality of the world; for in Christ he finds God and the world reconciled. And for just this reason the Christian is no longer the man of eternal conflict, but, just as the reality in Christ is one, so he, too, since he shares in this reality in Christ is himself an undivided whole. His worldliness does not divide him from Christ, and his Christianity does not divide him from the world. Belonging wholly to Christ, he stands at the same time wholly in the world.⁵⁶

Belonging to Christ means to belong to the ultimate, but as long as man stands in this world he stands in the penultimate. The two must therefore be distinguished. Bonhoeffer says:

Christian life is the dawning of the ultimate in me; it is the life of Jesus Christ in me. But it is always also life in the penultimate which waits for the ultimate. The earnestness of Christian life lies solely in the ultimate, but the penultimate, too, has its earnestness, which consists indeed precisely in never confusing the penultimate with the ultimate and in regarding the penultimate as an empty jest in comparison with the ultimate, so that the ultimate and the penultimate may alike retain their seriousness and validity. This demonstrated...the impossibility of any radical Christianity and of any compromising Christianity in the face of the reality of Jesus Christ and of His coming into the world.⁵⁷

What must be done...is to fortify the penultimate with a more emphatic proclamation of the ultimate, and also to protect the ultimate by taking due care for the penultimate.⁵⁸

As a part of the penultimate man is called to a life of responsibility or "deputyship." The Christian man is the responsible man.

Responsibility for oneself is in truth responsibility with respect to the man, and that means responsibility with respect to mankind. The fact that Jesus lived without the special responsibility of a marriage, of a family or a profession, does not by any means set Him outside the field of responsibility; on the contrary, it makes all the clearer His responsibility and His deputyship for all men. Here we

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56. Ibid., p. 67.

57. Ibid., p. 99.

58. Ibid., p. 100.

come already to the underlying basis of everything that has been said so far. Jesus, life, our life, lived in deputyship for us as the incarnate Son of God, and that is why through Him all human life is in essence a life of deputyship. Jesus was not the individual, desiring to achieve a perfection of His own, but He lived only as the one who has taken up into Himself and who bears within Himself the selves of all men. All His living, His action and His dying was deputyship. In Him there is fulfilled what the living, the action and the suffering of men ought to be. In this real deputyship which constitutes His human existence He is the responsible person "par excellence." Because He is life all life is determined by Him to be deputyship.⁵⁹

It is clear now that Bonhoeffer has moved beyond the boundaries of the Church and into the world.

...it is the world which is loved, condemned and reconciled in Christ, No man has the mission to overleap the world and to make it into the kingdom of God. Nor, on the other hand, does this give support to that pious indolence which abandons the wicked world to its fate and seeks only to rescue its own virtue. Man is appointed to the concrete and therefore limited responsibility which knows the world as being created, loved, condemned and reconciled by God and which acts within the world in accordance with this knowledge. The 'world' is thus the sphere of concrete responsibility which is given to us in and through Jesus Christ.⁶⁰

It is the world that Christ loves. Therefore in acting responsibly for the world He has taken the burden of its guilt upon Himself. Consequently He makes possible for man a life of "genuine worldliness." This He does by the cross. At the center of reality is the crucified Reconciler, Jesus Christ.

...this means in the first place that the whole world has become godless by its rejection of Jesus Christ and that no effort of its own can rid it of this curse. The reality of the world has been marked once and for all by the cross of Christ, but the cross of Christ is the cross of reconciliation of the world with God, and for this reason the godless world bears at the same time the mark of

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59. Ibid., p. 195.

60. Ibid., p. 202.

reconciliation as the free ordinance of God. The cross of atonement is the setting free for life before God in the midst of the godless world; it is the setting free for life in genuine worldliness. The proclamation of the cross of the atonement is a setting free because it leaves behind it the vain attempts to deify the world and because it has overcome the disunions, tensions and conflicts between the 'Christian' element and the 'secular' element and calls for simple life and action in the belief that the reconciliation of the world with God has been accomplished. A life in genuine worldliness is possible only through the proclamation of Christ crucified; truly worldly living is not possible or real in contradiction to the proclamation or side by side with it, that is to say, in any kind of autonomy of the secular sphere; it is possible and real only 'in, with and under' the proclamation of Christ.⁶¹

Now that we see Christ as Lord of the world and man set free by the Cross for a life of genuine worldliness, it is not too difficult to understand why Bonhoeffer's thoughts in prison took the form they did. In the next chapter we shall examine these thoughts as he expressed them. It would seem logical that he should raise the question of the non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts. There is an inner consistency and a logical development to his thoughts. As William O. Fennell wrote;

...in these ideas Bonhoeffer believed he was finding a corrective balance, and a movement toward wholeness, in his Christian thinking - and not a contradiction.⁶²

E. SUMMARY

Bonhoeffer was a Christocentric theologian. As a theologian his credentials were impeccable. Such men as Schlatter, Harnack, Deissmann, Lietzmann, Sellin, Holl, Seeberg, and above all Barth succeeded in influencing him. At the age of twenty-one he wrote Sanctorum Cummunio - a book that Barth called "a theological miracle."

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61. Ibid., p. 263.

62. Fennell, op. cit., p. 173.

Bonhoeffer's theme centered upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. His theology was essentially Christology and his Christology included ecclesiology within itself. One can say that we see in Bonhoeffer a "growing awareness of the total meaning of Jesus Christ." His great concern with the concreteness of God's revelation forced him to face the question of the non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts. Godsey suggests that three periods are discernible in his theological development. They are "Christ as community," "Christ as Lord of the Church," and "Christ as Lord of the world." It is the world that is "loved, condemned and reconciled in Christ."

CHAPTER III

THE QUESTION AND FRAGMENTARY ANSWERS

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A. Introduction

Bonhoeffer's Christological concern forced him to face the question of the non-religious interpretation of Christianity. Christ exists as the Church - a real community established in and through Christ. He is its Lord, but in a more total sense He is the Lord of the whole world. It is the world which is loved, condemned, and reconciled in Christ. Therefore a Christian is one who is set free to live a life of "genuine worldliness." The non-religious question must therefore be raised. This will be clear when we understand Bonhoeffer's definition of religion.

Another factor is introduced by Bonhoeffer in his letters. That is his emphasis upon "a world that has come of age." This made his raising of the non-religious question that much more imperative. Not only did Bonhoeffer's Christology lead to the question but the needs of the twentieth century world forced him to it. Harvey Cox says:

...his first reason for de-religionizing the Gospel was strictly theological. But Bonhoeffer also argued for a religionless Christianity because of the ethos of the modern world. He saw in the process of secularization, which he dated from about the time of the Renaissance, not some seasonal tempest which would soon blow over, but a coming to fruition of much that Christianity had planted in the soil of Western civilization.¹

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1. Harvey Cox, "Beyond Bonhoeffer," Commonweal, 82, No. 21, (Sept. 17, 1965), p. 656.

The question Bonhoeffer then raises is, "How can we be Christians in a world that has come of age?" His final and somewhat fragmentary answer is that we "participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of godless men."

The chapter will be divided into four main sections followed by a summary. The four sections are: This-Worldliness; The Non-Religious Interpretation; A World Come of Age; Participation in the Sufferings of God.

B. THIS-WORLDLINESS

As Christians we must live in this world. Though "this poor earth is not our home,"² this statement can only really be made at life's end. Bonhoeffer says,

...I am sure we ought to love God in our lives and in all the blessings he sends us. We should trust him in our lives, so that when our time comes, but not before, we may go to him in love and trust and joy. But, speaking frankly, to long for the transcendent when you are in your wife's arms is, to put it mildly, a lack of taste, and it is certainly not what God expects of us. We ought to find God and love him in the blessings he sends us.³

Another passage that warrants mentioning is taken from a letter dated January 23, 1944:

I am sure we honor God more if we gratefully accept the life he gives us with all its blessings, loving it and drinking it to the full, grieving deeply and sincerely when we have belittled or thrown away any of the precious things of life (some people grumble at such behaviour and say it is bourgeois to be so weak and sensitive) than we do if we are insensitive towards the blessings of life, and therefore equally insensitive toward pain.⁴

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2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Prisoner for God, edited by Eberhard Bethge, translated by Reginald H. Fuller, (New York: Macmillan), p.85.
3. Ibid., p.86.
4. Ibid., pp.93, 94.

Bonhoeffer's concern is therefore for this-worldliness. Christians are called to live in this world and not to seek escape into another world. Christians are called to live a life of "genuine worldliness." But the worldliness of the Christian is not the world's understanding of worldliness.

I don't mean the shallow this-worldliness of the enlightened, of the busy, the comfortable or the lascivious. It's something much more profound than that, something in which the knowledge of death and resurrection is ever present. I believe Luther lived a this-worldly life in this sense.⁵

Bonhoeffer draws support for his emphasis upon worldliness from the Old Testament. In fact he states that it can be dangerous for one "to want to get to the New Testament too soon and too directly."⁶

C. THE NON-RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION

Bonhoeffer's question now began to reach its final form. In his letter of April 30, 1944, he writes:

The thing that keeps coming back to me is, what is Christianity, and indeed what is Christ, for us today?"⁷

He then proceeds to give reasons for this raising of the question. The time of religion is over.

The time when men could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or simply pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience, which is to say the time of religion as such. We are proceeding towards a time of no religion at all; men as they are now simply cannot be religious any more.⁸

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- 5. Ibid., p.168.
- 6. Ibid., p.79.
- 7. Ibid., p.122.
- 8. Ibid.

This leads us to ask: What does Bonhoeffer mean by religion? Bethge has defined four characteristics of religion in Bonhoeffer's view. They may be listed as individualism, metaphysics, provincialism, and the "Deus ex machina" concept. Daniel Jenkins has summarized Bethge's definition.

First, it is individualistic. The religious man is preoccupied with himself and his interior states in such a way as to forget his neighbor, even though this individualism may take ascetic and apparently self-sacrificial forms. Secondly it is metaphysical. God is brought in to complete, as the supernatural, a fundamentally man-centered view of reality. Thirdly, the religious interest becomes more and more one department of life only. Scientific discovery and other forces push it more and more into insignificant areas of life. And fourthly, the God of religion is a "Deus ex machina," one who comes in from the outside to help his children when they are in trouble. He is not the One at the center of life, who controls and directs it and meets and sustains us in our strength as well as our weakness.⁹

Clifford Green suggests that Bonhoeffer's concept of religion is fundamentally two-fold. He sees individualism and metaphysics as "the two poles of the religious situation."¹⁰ Provincialism and the "Deus ex machina" concept are then not regarded as separate elements. Green suggests that

the "Deus ex machina" concept is the focal point of the whole pole of metaphysics - it is the buttress "par excellence."¹¹

Provincialism is described as a derivative feature rather than a fundamental feature of religion.

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9. Daniel Jenkins, Beyond Religion, (Naperville:SCM Book Club, 1962), p. 34.
10. Clifford Green, "Bonhoeffer's Concept of Religion," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, 19, No. 1, (Nov. 1963), p. 17.
11. Ibid.

Provincialism is not so much a fundamental feature of Bonhoeffer's definition of religion as a derivative description of the area of life which religion occupies. Provincialism, whether in personal or social life, is the inevitable consequence of religion as Bonhoeffer views it.¹²

Bonhoeffer's brief definition would seem to support Green's view. He says,

What do I mean by 'interpret in a religious sense?' In my view, that means to speak on the one hand metaphysically, and on the other individualistically. Neither of these is relevant to the Bible message or to the man of today.¹³

Bonhoeffer suggests that our 1900-year old Christian preaching has been based upon the religious premise of man.

What does "religious a priori" mean? It is the unspoken presupposition, carried through the centuries, that man needs the idea of God in order to develop himself to solve his problems, and to understand the world. On this presupposition preaching was formed and texts were interpreted religiously in accordance with it.¹⁴

But, in fact, this "religious a priori" does not exist. It may have been a historical and temporary form of human self-expression, but it is no longer necessary. We must accept the fact that modern man is not religious at all. This led Bonhoeffer to raise several questions.

The questions needing answers would surely be: What is the significance of a Church (church, parish, preaching, Christian life) in a religionless world? How do we speak of God without religion, i.e. without the temporally-influenced presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, and so on? How do we speak (but perhaps we are no longer capable of speaking of such things as we used to) in a secular fashion of God? In what way are we in a religionless and secular sense Christians, in what way are we the "Ekklesia," 'those who are called forth,' not conceiving

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12. Ibid.

13. Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 125.

14. William Hamilton, "A Secular Theology for a World Come of Age," Theology Today, 18, No. 4, (Jan. 1962), p. 123.

of ourselves as especially favoured, but as wholly belonging to the world? Then Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, indeed and in truth the Lord of the world. Yet what does that signify? What is the place of worship and prayer in an entire absence of religion? Does the secret discipline, or, as the case may be, the distinction... between penultimate and ultimate, at this point acquire fresh importance?¹⁵

Such questions seem overwhelming. They are in a sense all part of the main question. Bonhoeffer only gave fragmentary answers to them.

Man can no longer be forced into a boundary situation in order that a need for God might be created. This is what religious man has always done.

Religious people speak of God when human perception is (often just from laziness) at an end, or human resources fail: it is really always the "Deus ex machina" they call to their aid, either for the so-called solving of insoluble problems or as support in human failure - always, that is to say, helping out human weakness on the borders of human existence.¹⁶

God, however, is not on the borders of life, but at its center. He is not the "Deus ex machina" that man relies upon when human resources have reached their limit.

I should like to speak of God not on the borders of life but at its centre, not in weakness but in strength, not, therefore, in man's suffering and death but in his life and prosperity. On the borders it seems to me better to hold our peace and leave the problem unsolved. Belief in the Resurrection is not the solution of the problem of death. The 'beyond' of God is not the beyond of our perception faculties. The transcendence of theory on perception has nothing to do with the transcendence of God. God is the 'beyond' in the midst of life.¹⁷

We can no longer speak to a man in his weakness and despair. Even death holds little terror for man today. "Death and fear of death hold no power to move man any closer to God."¹⁸ The Christian is

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15. Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 123.

16. Ibid., p. 124.

17. Ibid.

18. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 441.

therefore driven to search for a non-religious understanding of Christianity. In his letter of May 25, 1944, Bonhoeffer writes;

We should find God in what we do know, not in what we don't; not in outstanding problems, but in those we have already solved. This is true not only for the relation between Christianity and science, but also for wider human problems such as guilt, suffering, and death. It is possible nowadays to find answers to these problems which leave God right out of the picture. It just isn't true to say that Christianity alone has the answers. In fact the Christian answers are no more conclusive or compelling than any of the others. Once more, God cannot be used as a stop-gap. We must not wait until we are at the end of our tether: he must be found at the center of life: in life, and not only in death; in health and vigor, and not only in suffering; in activity, and not only in sin.¹⁹

God must be found in the center of life and not at its extremities. Bonhoeffer supports these statements on Christological grounds.

The ground for this lies in the revelation of God in Christ. Christ is the centre of life, and in no sense did He come to answer our unsolved problems. From the centre of life certain questions are seen to be wholly irrelevant, and so are the answers commonly given to them - I am thinking for example of the judgment pronounced on the friends of Job. In Christ there are no Christian problems.²⁰

Christ did not answer our unsolved problems. Rather, He came to express His full acceptance of the world. That acceptance is seen in its sharpest focus on the cross. The Christian is therefore called to fully accept the world as it is.

The Christian, unlike the devotees of the salvation myths, does not need a last refuge in the eternal from earthly tasks and difficulties. But like Christ himself ('My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?') he must drink the earthly cup to the lees, and only in his doing that is the crucified and risen Lord with him, and he crucified and

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19. Bonhoeffer, op.cit., p.142.

20. Ibid., p.143.

risen with Christ. This world must not be prematurely written off. In this the Old and New Testaments are at one. Myths of salvation arise from human experiences of the boundary situation. Christ takes hold of a man in the center of his life.²¹

Since Christ takes hold of a man in the center of his life there is no need to burden man with problems, needs, and conflicts in order to drive him to God. This is cheap "Methodism."

When Jesus blessed sinners, they were real sinners, but Jesus did not make every man a sinner first. He called them out of their sin, not into their sin. Of course, encounter with Jesus meant the reversal of all human values. So it was in the conversion of St. Paul, though in his case the knowledge of sin preceded his encounter with Jesus. Of course Jesus took to himself the dregs of human society, harlots, and publicans, but never them alone, for he sought to take to himself man as such. Never did Jesus throw any doubt on a man's health, vigor, or fortune, regarded in themselves, or look upon them as evil fruits. Else why did he heal the sick and restore strength to the weak? Jesus claims for himself and the kingdom of God the whole of human life in all its manifestations.²²

Thus we see that Christ claims human life in all its manifestations for Himself. The "religious a priori" of man therefore simply does not exist. God is not a "Deus ex machina" ready for man in his extremities. God is at the center of life. A non-religious interpretation of Christianity is therefore essential. The Gospel of Christ demands it.

D. A WORLD COME OF AGE

Christology demands the non-religious interpretation. Throughout all his life it was the figure of Christ that captured Bonhoeffer's attention. Now, however, another factor is introduced

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21. Ibid., p. 154.

22. Ibid., pp. 156, 157.

in his letters. That is: "a world come of age." In his letter of June 8, 1944 Bonhoeffer writes:

The movement beginning about the thirteenth century... towards the autonomy of man (under which head I place the discovery of the laws by which the world lives and manages in science, social and political affairs, art, ethics and religion) has in our time reached a certain completion. Man has learned to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis. In questions concerning science, art, and even ethics, this has become an understood thing which one scarcely dares to tilt at any more. But for the last hundred years or so it has been increasingly true of religious questions also: it is becoming evident that everything gets along without 'God', and just as well as before. As in the scientific field, so in human affairs generally, what we call 'God' is being more and more edged out of life, losing more and more ground.²³

God is being more and more edged out of life. Man can get along very well without Him. In this manner Bonhoeffer describes the historical situation. We live in a world that has attained "adulthood" - a world that has reached "maturity." The "world come of age" also demands a "non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts." Regin Preter remarks:

The non-religious interpretation of revelation which Bonhoeffer seeks wants above all to express the relation of God's revelation to the world which has come of age.²⁴

In asserting that our world has come of age, Bonhoeffer criticizes Christian apologetic for its attack upon the world's

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23. Ibid., pp. 145, 146.

24. Hamilton, op.cit., p. 448.

adulthood. He criticizes Tillich for interpreting the evolution of the world in a religious sense. He criticizes Barth not for being religious but for giving "no concrete guidance, either in dogmatics or in ethics, on the non-religious interpretation of theological concepts."²⁵ This was Barth's limitation and therefore his theology of revelation has become a "positivism of revelation."²⁶ Bultmann is also criticized for his understanding of the New Testament as a "mythological garbing of the universal truth."²⁷ Bonhoeffer adds:

The New Testament is not a mythological garbing of the universal truth; this mythology (resurrection and so on) is the thing itself - but the concepts must be interpreted in such a way as not to make religion a pre-condition of faith (cf. circumcision in St. Paul).²⁸

Bonhoeffer concludes his critical comments by stating:

The world's coming of age is then no longer an occasion for polemics and apologetics, but it is really better understood than it understands itself, namely on the basis of the Gospel, and in the light of Christ.²⁹

In his letter of July 16, 1944 Bonhoeffer supports his view of the world come of age by his understanding of history. Rather than seeing the process of secularization as a calamity he sees it as necessary and desirable. Bonhoeffer writes:

On the historical side I should say there is one great development which leads to the idea of the autonomy of the world. In theology it is first discernible in Lord Herbert of Cherbury, with his assertion that reason is the sufficient instrument of religious knowledge. In ethics it first appears in Montaigne and Bodin with their substitution of moral principles for the commandments. In politics, Machiavelli, who emancipates politics from the tutelage of morality, and founds the doctrine of 'reasons of state.' Later, and very differently, though like Machiavelli tending towards the autonomy of human society

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25. Bonhoeffer, op.cit., p.148.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., p.149.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

comes Grotius, with his international law as the law of nature, a law which would still be valid, etsi deus non daretur. The process is completed in philosophy. On the one hand we have the deism of Descartes, who holds the world is a mechanism which runs on its own without any intervention of God. On the other hand there is the pantheism of Spinoza, with its identification of God with nature. In the last resort Kant is a deist, Fichte and Hegel pantheists. All along the line there is a growing tendency to assert the autonomy of man and the world.³⁰

In natural science the process seems to start with Nicolas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno with their 'heretical' doctrine of the infinity of space. The classical cosmos was finite, like the created world of the middle ages. An infinite universe, however it is conceived, is self-subsisting etsi deus non daretur. It is true that modern physics is not so sure as it was about the infinity of the universe, but it has not returned to the earlier conceptions of its finitude.³¹

Thus we see that beginning with the Renaissance, continuing through the Enlightenment, and nearing completion in our day Bonhoeffer affirms the process of secularizing. God is gradually but definitely being edged out of life.

There is no longer any need for God as a working hypothesis, whether in morals, politics or science. Nor is there any need for such a God in religion or philosophy (Feuerbach). In the name of intellectual honesty these working hypotheses should be dropped or dispensed with as far as possible.³²

Ultimate honesty is required. God must be dropped as a working hypothesis.

...the only way to be honest is to recognize that we have to live in the world etsi deus non daretur.³³

Bonhoeffer therefore sees in the process of secularizing a demand for a non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts.

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30. Ibid., pp.162,163.

31. Ibid., p.163.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

As previously indicated, Bonhoeffer's Christological understanding also demanded it. These two seemingly incompatible factors are combined in his thought. Herein lies much of Bonhoeffer's uniqueness.

Bethge writes:

Of course, secularization has been greeted before Bonhoeffer by many other sons of Christendom, but by none with this Christology as background or by doing it in the name of Christ. The new discovery seems to be the full and positive value to modern secularization accepted as our peculiar Christian heritage, not in spite of, but because of, our faith. Secularization is to be understood not just as defection and guilt but as the necessary business of Christianity. Its promises lie in throwing out all idolatries. Secularization might frighten the present Churches, because they have made it a terrible demon or devil. Yet with Bonhoeffer it is no longer the menacing giant but the necessary and positive counterpoint in God's symphony.³⁴

E. PARTICIPATION IN THE SUFFERINGS OF GOD

The question must now be raised: "How can we be Christians in a world that has come of age?" Bonhoeffer was never able to give a complete answer. But he does supply some fragmentary answers.

He says:

Man is challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world.³⁵

The Christian is called to participate in the sufferings of God. "The world come of age is now seen as the world in which God suffers."³⁶

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34. Hamilton, op.cit., p.452.

35. Bonhoeffer, op.cit., p.166.

36. Hamilton, op.cit., p.454.

God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who makes us live in this world without using him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing. Before God and with him we live without God. God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us. Matthew 8:17 makes it crystal clear that it is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us, but by his weakness and suffering.³⁷

Thus God is seen as a suffering God. And it is only as a suffering God that He can help us. Christ is the triumphant Lord of all life, but He is so by His weakness and suffering. Relating these ideas to Bonhoeffer's previous writings, William Hamilton says:

In the Ethics, Jesus was seen as the triumphant Lord, in whom the whole reality of the world, secular and religious, was drawn together. This united world is now wholly in Jesus' hands. But now, at the end of his life, Bonhoeffer returns to the idea of Lordship, but it is no longer a Lordship of triumph and completion, but of suffering and humiliation. If Bonhoeffer was aware of moving away from the humiliation Christology of his 1933 Berlin lectures in The Cost of Discipleship and in what we know as the early pages of the Ethics, these final letters from prison seem to return to the same "theology of incarnation and humiliation, the fullness of God to be found in that limited, weak, and humiliated man Jesus, who took the risk of utter human concreteness."³⁸

The fullness of God is seen in the suffering Saviour. The Christian is called to participate with Him. The disciple of Christ must do the following:

He must therefore plunge himself into the life of a godless world, without attempting to gloss over its ungodliness with a veneer of religion or trying to transfigure it. He must live a 'worldly' life and

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37. Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 164.

38. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 455.

so participate in the sufferings of God. He may live a worldly life as one emancipated from all false religions and obligations. To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to cultivate some particular form of asceticism (as a sinner, a penitent or a saint), but to be a man. It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world. This is metanoia. It is not in the first instance bothering about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up in the way of Christ, into the Messianic event, and thus fulfilling Isaiah 53.³⁹

Summing up these thoughts and relating them to Bonhoeffer's concept of deputyship, Walter Hartmann suggests the following three elements that make for discipleship. Or to return to the form of the original question, what it means to be a Christian in a world come of age.

1) to plunge oneself into the life of a godless world. Discipleship takes place not in a religious reservation but in the midst of the real problems of life as it is going on all around us. 2) Not imposing upon the problems of this world particular religious principles, offering particular religious help or consolation. But looking for the pertinent solution. With all the courage of him who does not worry about himself, who does not need to prove any religious standpoint, but who is completely free as a selfless deputy to put himself into the shoes of the other person and take the next step that is pertinent for the solution of the problem. 3) To be ready to accept the guilt into which every responsible action involves us and the hatred of those who are opposed to it. This means: to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Participate⁴⁰ wherever deputyship and responsible action is called for.

In an outline for a book, Bonhoeffer suggests somewhat similar thoughts in speaking of our relation to God.

Our relation to God [is] not a religious relationship to a supreme Being, absolute in power and goodness, which is a spurious conception of transcendence, but a new life for others, through participation in the Being of God.

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39. Bonhoeffer, op.cit., p.166.

40. Walter Hartmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer - The Theologian, A lecture to the student body of Biblical Seminary during the 1964-65 Academic Year. (Mimeographed). p.8.

The transcendence consists not in tasks beyond our scope and power, but in the nearest thing to hand. God in human form, not, as in other religions, in animal form - the monstrous, chaotic, remote and terrifying - nor yet in abstract form - the absolute, metaphysical, infinite, etc. - nor yet in the Greek divine-human of autonomous man, but man existing for others, and hence the Crucified.⁴¹

The Christian is therefore one who participates in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world by being a man for others. The tasks he deals with are those that are nearest at hand. It is here that the transcendent is expressed. He does not impose any religious solution upon a problem but seeks the pertinent solution and accepts the guilt involved in such action.

Finally Bonhoeffer hints at the form the Church should take in this world come of age.

The Church is her true self only when she exists for humanity. As a fresh start she should give away all her endowments to the poor and needy. The clergy should live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling. She must take her part in the social life of the world, not lording it over men, but helping and serving them. She must tell men, whatever their calling, what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others. And in particular, our own Church will have to take a strong line with the blasphemies of hybris, power-worship, envy and humbug, for these are roots of evil. She will have to speak of moderation, purity, confidence, loyalty, steadfastness, patience, discipline, humility, content and modesty. She must not underestimate the importance of human example, which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus, and which is so important in the teaching of St. Paul.... Further: the question of revising the creeds (the Apostles' Creed). Revision of Christian apologetics. Reform of the training for the ministry and the pattern of clerical life. All this is very crude and sketchy, but there are certain things I want to say simply and clearly, things we so often prefer to ignore. Whether I shall succeed or not is another matter.... But I hope in this way to do something for the sake of the Church of the future.⁴²

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41. Bonhoeffer, op.cit., p.179.

42. Ibid. pp.180,181.

Unfortunately, Bonhoeffer never did succeed in saying all the things he wanted to. We are left with many questions still unanswered, but there can be no doubt that Bonhoeffer left in his legacy "something for the sake of the Church of the future." Harvey Cox writes:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer...despite the fact that he has become an enigma, a fad, a saint and in some cases an embarrassment in the two decades since his execution by the SS - still had his finger on the very issues which continue to torment us. We must be careful not to tear Bonhoeffer out of his context and apply his somewhat fragmentary insights in a wholly different setting. All the same we cannot "move beyond" him because we have not yet faced his challenge seriously. His uncanny capacity to uncover the hidden skeletons in the closets of theology and to see issues coming around the corner means that we have not shaken him.⁴³

To return to the question of being a Christian in a world come of age, we quote in conclusion from Bonhoeffer's letter of July 21, 1944.

...it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to believe. One must abandon every attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, a converted sinner, a churchman (the priestly type, so-called!) a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. This is what I mean by worldliness - taking life in one's stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its experiences and helplessness. It is in such a life that we throw ourselves utterly in the arms of God and participate in his sufferings in the world and watch with Christ in Gethsemane. That is faith, that is metanoia, and that is what makes a man a Christian.⁴⁴

F. SUMMARY

Bonhoeffer was concerned with this world. One might say that he was the theologian of the concrete, par excellence. Christ

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43. Cox, op.cit., pp.653,654.

44. Bonhoeffer, op.cit., p.169.

is not only the Lord of the Church, but also the Lord of the godless world. It is the world which is loved, condemned, and reconciled in Christ. The question of the non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts must therefore be raised. The day of religion is over. Religion's emphasis upon individualism and metaphysics is inadequate as an expression of the Gospel of Christ. God can no longer be entreated as a "Deus ex machina." Christology demands the non-religious interpretation.

Bonhoeffer added another factor to his demand for the non-religious interpretation. That was the process of world secularization which began with the Renaissance and continued through the Enlightenment. This process has been the cause of God being gradually but definitely edged out of life. Bonhoeffer welcomed it as the necessary business of Christianity. "There is no longer any need for God as a working hypothesis...." The world's coming of age demands the non-religious interpretation.

Bonhoeffer's understanding of Christology and his acceptance of secularization or man's coming of age are combined in his plea for a non-religious interpretation. This combination gave Bonhoeffer his uniqueness.

The Christian in this world come of age is therefore called upon to "participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world." Only a suffering God can help. These ideas form part of his fragmentary answers to the non-religious question he raised. He was never able to complete what he had hoped to do. We are left with the question. We cannot avoid it. It demands an answer.

PART II

ATTEMPTS AT ANSWERING THE QUESTION

CHAPTER IV

PAUL VAN BUREN AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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PAUL VAN BUREN AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

A. INTRODUCTION

The question that Dietrich Bonhoeffer raised continues to haunt us. It is a question that scores of men are giving serious thought to. One of these men is Paul Van Buren. His book The Secular Meaning of the Gospel is an attempt to answer the question. Referring to Bonhoeffer, Van Buren in the introduction to his book writes:

His question still lies before us: How can the Christian who is himself a secular man understand his faith in a secular way? We intend to answer this question with the help of a method far removed from Bonhoeffer's thought. The answer will be reached by analyzing what a man means when he uses the language of faith, when he repeats the earliest Christian confession: "Jesus is Lord."¹

Van Buren refers to a method far removed from Bonhoeffer's thought. The method he speaks of is that of "linguistic analysis." After analyzing Van Buren's answer we shall attempt to see whether or not it can be considered as adequate or not.

But before we proceed, we should know something about Paul Van Buren. Presently, Van Buren teaches at Temple University in Philadelphia as an associate professor of religion. He is an ordained Episcopal minister and prior to coming to Temple he taught at Texas' Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest. One can therefore say that Van Buren moved out from under the sacred shrine to teach in the secular sphere. This concrete step is somewhat representative of an

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1. Paul M. Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, (New York:Macmillan, 1963), pp. 2,3.

even greater step he took in his theological development. His book The Secular Meaning of the Gospel marks that step. In the April 7, 1965 issue of The Christian Century, Van Buren writes:

In making up my mind about the function and content and norms of theology, I reflect increasingly on the function, content and norms of religion in its cultural context and more specifically on the contemporary form of that problem. Three years ago, at the time I was finishing The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, I was moving in this direction after a number of years of wrestling with the problems of classical Christology within the context of my church. My book represented an important step in a personal struggle to overcome my own theological past, and it served to help me over a hump. Since getting to the other side I have been occupied with finding my way about in the realm outside a "theological circle" which was becoming increasingly unreal. I am trying to see the role and nature of theology in the context of the plurality and relativity of contemporary culture.²

The hump that Van Buren speaks of getting over was by no means a small one. It meant that God had to go. In discussing The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, William Hamilton says,

The really important thing in this...book is that Van Buren is honestly trying to do theology without a doctrine of God. It's not just that he avoids the word - anybody can do that; he also carefully avoids God-substitutes like "ground of being" and "transcendence."³

A theology without a doctrine of God - in such a way Van Buren seeks to answer Bonhoeffer. There is more to it than that as we shall see. The book is extremely significant. Gilkey of The University of Chicago says:

This book is good, certainly important, and often, as are most such books, irritating. It is good because it is original - one of the most genuinely creative theological

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2. Paul M. Van Buren, "Theology in the Context of Culture," The Christian Century, 82, No. 14, (April 7, 1965), p. 429.
3. William Hamilton, "There is No God and Jesus is His Son," A Review of The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, by Paul M. Van Buren, The Christian Century, 80, No. 40, (Oct. 2, 1963), p. 1208.

efforts to appear in a couple of decades...it is a book which will deservedly be much discussed and argued over and that every student of current directions in theology would be well advised to read and ponder.⁴

We shall therefore begin our study of the book. The chapter will be divided into five main sections. They include: linguistic analysis, theology, Jesus of Nazareth, secular meaning and a comparison with Bonhoeffer. Following these main sections will be a summary.

B. LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Van Buren employs the method of "linguistic analysis" to answer Bonhoeffer's question. He defines this method very simply by saying:

Linguistic analysis is what this name implies: a method, not a philosophical doctrine. It simply clarifies the meaning of statements by investigating the way in which they are ordinarily used.⁵

Linguistic analysis grew out of a movement called logical positivism. Beginning in the early part of this century this movement had little use for theology. Its emphasis was upon empiricism. Van Buren says:

Logical Positivism judged all theological statements to be meaningless because they could not meet the verification principle of that philosophy: that, apart from the assertions of logic and mathematics, only statements which can be verified or falsified empirically are meaningful. Statements having to do with an invisible ineffable God, a transcendent

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4. Langdon B. Gilkey, Review of The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, by Paul M. Van Buren, The Journal of Religion, 44, No. 3, (July, 1964), p. 238.
5. Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, p. 3.

"absolute," and the whole field of classical metaphysics in general could be neither proved nor disproved. Having no empirical function they could not be called true or false, and they were consequently regarded as meaningless.⁶

During the past quarter of a century, however, this dogmatic view has been somewhat modified. This modification is due in "large part to the influence of an eccentric Austrian-born Cambridge don named Ludwig Wittgenstein, who died in 1951."⁷ That which cannot be empirically proved is no longer to be dismissed as nonsense. This does not mean, however, that the verification principle must be disregarded. Rather, it now serves another function in contemporary linguistic analysis, Van Buren says:

There are a variety of "language-games," activities with their appropriate languages, and a modified verification principle is now used to ask what sort of things would count against it. If we know that, we can say in which "language-game" the assertion is "at home." It is now recognized that different kinds of language are appropriate to different situations.⁸

Van Buren has therefore adopted linguistic analysis to interpret the religion "games." Its purpose is to "rid us of... language cramps, when we cannot say just what we mean (and have to keep adding other sentences to say what we 'actually' mean) and do not seem to mean just what we say."⁹ This is essential for the Christian of today's secular world - a world that sees little sense in ancient apostolic confessions.

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6. Ibid., pp. 14,15.

7. "Linguistic Analysis:A Way For Some to Affirm Their Faith," Time, 84, No. 2, (July 10, 1964), p. 64.

8. Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, p. 15.

9. Ibid., p. 16.

Several contemporary analysts of the language of faith are selected by Van Buren in his attempt to arrive at an adequate analysis of religious assertions. Among them are Anthony Flew, R. M. Hare, Ian T. Ramsey, T. R. Miles, and R. B. Braithwaite. The most significant idea derived from these men is the "blik" theory of religious language. The word "blik" was invented by Hare for a fundamental attitude. "A 'blik' is not achieved by empirical inquiry."¹⁰ But it is essential to an explanation of life. Hare says:

...without a blik there can be no explanation; for it is by our blik, that we decide what is and what is not an explanation.¹¹

A "blik" may be defined as,

...an orientation, a commitment to see the world in a certain way, and a way of life following inevitably upon this orientation.¹²

The language of a "blik" is therefore the language of discernment and commitment. It is a world perspective entailing a commitment to a certain way of life.

Van Buren's choice of a Christian "blik" is a noncognitive choice. It centers in an event that happened in past history.

...our commitments are such as to lead us to reject a search for a religious preserve to be investigated by a special religious way of knowing, and we are committed to a Gospel which begins, not with an argument for undifferentiated theism, but with the impact of whatever it was that happened on Easter in the context of a particular history.¹³

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10. Ibid., p. 85.

11. Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, (ed.), New-Essays in Philosophical Theology, (London:SCM Press, 1955), p. 101.

12. Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, p. 87.

13. Ibid., p. 99.

The Easter event is central to Van Buren's understanding of the secular meaning of the Gospel. Something actually happened in a particular historical context and what we need to determine is exactly what that was. We shall be able to do so by the method of linguistic analysis. Van Buren says:

For the particular language-game which we are playing, imprecisely identified as "seeking the secular meaning of the Gospel," the heart of the method of linguistic analyses lies in the use of the verification principle - that the meaning of a word is its use in its context. The meaning of a statement is to be found in, and is identical with, the function of that statement. If a statement has a function, so that it may in principle be verified or falsified the statement is meaningful, and unless or until a theological statement can be submitted in some way to verification, it cannot be said to have a meaning in our language-game.¹⁴

Whatever therefore can be determined to be meaningful "about Jesus as a figure in history and about the significance of what has been called 'the Easter event' for the development of the Gospel in its various New Testament expressions and in the later language of theology"¹⁵ will help to clear the air for a secular meaning of the Gospel. Van Buren says:

A careful, functional analysis of the language of the New Testament, the Fathers, and contemporary believers will reveal the secular meaning of the Gospel.¹⁶

C. THEOLOGY

Before looking at the historical figure Jesus and the Easter event, let us see how Van Buren views theology in both its past and present forms. He discusses the conservative concern for Christology

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14. Ibid., pp. 104, 105.

15. Ibid., p. 19.

16. Ibid.

and the "liberal" concern with a contemporary way of thinking.

The conservative concern for Christology has its roots in the past. The formula of Chalcedon stands as a high point in the Church's concern to maintain an "orthodox" view of Christ. Its problem was that it did not do justice to the manhood of Jesus of Nazareth. But taken in its context it was an adequate interpretation of the Gospel for ancient man who considered the world in mythological terminology. Today it is inadequate. The empiricism and this-worldliness of modern man demand a new interpretation. But Van Buren insists that his secular interpretation is faithful to "the 'logic' and the 'intention' of both the biblical gospel and the formative theology of the patristic period."¹⁷

Van Buren also considers a modern conservative Biblical theology of "call" and "response." In a somewhat reluctant manner, however, he also discards this contemporary interpretation as still being too mythological. He says:

This interpretation of Jesus and the Gospel...is being developed in many quarters by men influenced by biblical theology, and it is intended to be faithful to the concerns evident in the Christology of the Fathers.... At the center stands the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But although such an interpretation may be called "orthodox," it is still, from the point of view of the theological "left," sadly mythological in form, if not in content.¹⁸

The theological "left" is then considered by Van Buren. The concern of the "left" is with a contemporary way of thinking. Two men are chosen by Van Buren to represent this concern - one

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17. Gilkey, op. cit., p. 239.

18. Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, pp. 54,55.

is Rudolf Bultmann and the other is his potent adapter Schubert Ogden. Gilkey sums up in a very concise fashion Van Buren's criticism of their existentialist interpretation of the Gospel.

- (1) Both continue to make significant use of the word "god," whereas discourse about God is now seen according to the empirical principle (the modified verification criterion) to be meaningless, whether in Bultmann's "analogical" or in Ogden's process - philosophical modes.
- (2) While the gospel language does speak about man and his needs, nevertheless it also speaks about God and his acts; hence it is false to claim an equivalence between the language of the gospel which speaks of God and the language of existential anthropology that talks only of man.
- (3) While the gospel language does speak of the believer's decision as important, nevertheless as a form of discourse it also informs us of concrete events in actual history as the basis of these decisions; hence it is false to claim an equivalence between a New Testament discourse about historical events and an existentialist discourse about human decisions.¹⁹

Modern theology must be a theology without a doctrine of God even if the name God is substituted by some such phrase as the "ground and end of all things." And the historical events involving Jesus of Nazareth dare not be displaced by an analysis of existence. Hence, all forms of God-language must go, but Jesus of Nazareth must stay. Van Buren says:

...if the choice is between "God," however subtly hidden in oblique language, and the man Jesus of Nazareth, the empirically-minded, secular "believer" can only choose the latter, for he does not know what to do with Theology. Analogical as well as literal language about God makes no sense to him. He may or may not find existentialism's analysis of existence enlightening, but if he wishes to understand the Gospel, he cannot responsibly circumvent Jesus and the peculiar way in which his history is presented by the documents of the New Testament. Because the situation of "modern man" is in us and not outside of us, our analysis of the theological "left" as well as of the "right" leads us to

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19. Gilkey, op. cit., p. 239.

reconsider the language of the New Testament concerning Jesus of Nazareth.²⁰

D. JESUS OF NAZARETH

This leads us to Van Buren's central emphasis. Up to this point it is apparent that his approach is a very radical one. Gene Reeves sums it up by saying:

Van Buren's...radical approach to Christian theology includes, on the one hand, a frank agnosticism based upon an extensive use of contemporary analytic philosophy, and, on the other hand, a Christocentric interpretation of Christian faith.²¹

Van Buren's interpretation of the Gospel is Christocentric. This is so because in this case something "meaningful" can be said to today's empirically-minded man. Jesus was not a mythological figure - he was a part of human history.

Whatever else we might say about Jesus of Nazareth, he has a place in the realm of human action in the past.²²

The one dominant characteristic that stands out in the life of Jesus is that he was a "remarkably free man." This freedom was two-fold. He was free from all forms of anxieties and needs and at the same time free for his neighbor. Van Buren goes so far as to sum up all the characteristics of Jesus around the one concept of freedom. He adds:

Others have used other terms, like "faith." We prefer the word "freedom" to the word "faith" in part because it does not lead us so easily onto the slippery ground

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20. Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, p. 79.

21. Gene Reeves, "A Look at Contemporary American Theology," Religion in Life, 34, No. 4, (Autumn 1965), p. 520.

22. Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, p. 111.

of the nonempirical.²³

The question we may now ask is: How did Jesus elicit faith in his disciples? Van Buren insists that He did not do so as a historical figure. He says:

...there were no Christians before Easter.... The man Jesus, however free he may have been, did not produce in his disciples enough freedom to survive the events of the Passion Narrative. They turned and ran; they lost hope; they were discouraged.²⁴

The historical Jesus therefore failed to elicit faith, but at the same time the historical Jesus is indispensable for faith. For the basis of faith is Easter. Something happened then that changed the disciples. They became free men.

We might say that, on Easter, the freedom of Jesus began to be contagious.²⁵

Easter was therefore a discernment situation for the disciples. From this they derived a whole new perspective on life. Van Buren sums up this idea by saying:

They experienced a discernment situation in which Jesus the free man whom they had known, themselves, and indeed the whole world, were seen in a quite new way. From that moment, the disciples began to possess something of the freedom of Jesus. His freedom began to be "contagious." For the disciples, therefore, the story of Jesus could not be told simply as the story of a free man who had died. Because of the new way in which the disciples saw him and because of what had happened to them, the story had to include the event of Easter. In telling the story of Jesus of Nazareth, therefore, they told it as the story of the free man who had set them free. This was the story which they proclaimed as the Gospel for all men.²⁶

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23. Ibid., p. 123.

24. Ibid., p. 125.

25. Ibid., p. 133.

26. Ibid., p. 134.

E. SECULAR MEANINGS

In today's world the man who hears the Gospel proclaimed may experience the same kind of discernment that the disciples did after Easter. This would mean that he would "'see' Jesus in a new way and acquire a new perspective upon himself and the whole of life."²⁷ This new perspective is to be understood as a "blik" by which the believer is "grasped" and "held." Van Buren says:

The man who says, "Jesus is Lord," is saying that the history of Jesus and of what happened on Easter has exercised a liberating effect upon him, and that he has been so grasped by it that it has become the historical norm of his perspective upon life. His confession is a notification of this perspective and a recommendation to his listener to see Jesus, the world, and himself in this same way and to act accordingly.²⁸

Grasped by this "blik" the believer is one then who is free to give himself in service for the world. And other men will be liberated by the contagion of this freedom and perspective. This is what has been happening for centuries. It happens today. Van Buren says:

...in the context of hearing this apostolic proclamation, men have been liberated. Their response, which the New Testament calls "faith," consists in acknowledging that this has happened by accepting the liberator, Jesus of Nazareth, as the man who defines for them what it means to be a man and as the point of orientation for their lives. They are "in Christ," which is to say that their understanding of themselves and their lives and all things is determined by their understanding of Jesus. They are a "new creation" in that this orientation to the whole world is new for them.²⁹

Van Buren goes on to offer further "empirical" meanings for Christianity and Christian doctrine. As already implied, such meanings are therefore "secular" meanings and are "meaningful" to modern man.

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27. Ibid., p. 137.

28. Ibid., p. 141.

29. Ibid., p. 138.

The word "God" is now definitely meaningless.

Whatever can be known concerning "God" has been answered by the knowledge of Jesus made available in the event of Easter. Whatever "God" means - as the goal of human existence, as the truth about man and the world, or as the key to the meaning of life - "he" is to be found in Jesus, the "way, the truth, and the life."³⁰

All of Van Buren's interpretations center around what we have discussed already - Jesus of Nazareth, Easter, contagious freedom, and the "blik." Empiricism is essential. An example is Van Buren's understanding of the divinity or Lordship of Christ. To assert that Jesus is Lord is no longer to place oneself at the center of one's picture of the universe, but to be to some extent free of one's neighbor.

In effect Van Buren has reduced the Christian faith to its historical and ethical dimensions. He feels that such a reduction is essential for the secular man of today. The Gospel must be made "meaningful" to man in his own historical context. Such meaning can be derived by use of the modified verification principle. Meaningless theological statements when taken as straightforward empirical assertions of the world are thereby given use and meaning as the expressions of a historical perspective with far-reaching empirical consequences in a man's life.³¹ Van Buren says,

If this is a reduction in the content of theology, it is the sort of reduction which has been made by modern culture in many fields. Astrology has been "reduced" to astronomy.... Alchemy was "reduced" to chemistry by the rigorous application of an empirical method.... In almost every field of human learning, the metaphysical and cosmological aspect has disappeared

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30. Ibid., p. 147.

31. Ibid., p. 199.

and the subject matter has been "limited" to the human, the historical, and the empirical. Theology cannot escape this tendency if it is to be a serious mode of contemporary thought....³²

The question we must now raise is: Did Van Buren do justice to Bonhoeffer's question? He himself says:

...Bonhoeffer hoped that a "non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts" would both overcome the weakness of liberal theology and at the same time do justice to its legitimate question. Our method is one which never occurred to Bonhoeffer, but our interpretation may nonetheless serve to justify his hope.³³

F. COMPARISON WITH BONHOEFFER

Van Buren sought to answer Bonhoeffer's question by the use of a method far removed from Bonhoeffer's thought. His choice of this method "stems from his equation of 'secular' with 'empirical' and of empirical with the verifiability theory of meaning in analytic philosophy."³⁴ Because of this commitment Van Buren ends up rejecting the word "God" in favor of a "blik." In this he certainly can be said to have moved beyond Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer believed in God. God is the beyond in the midst of life. It is true that the world can no longer use Him as a working hypothesis, but that does not imply that what we say about Him is "meaningless." Man has matured and he must learn to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God, but by that Bonhoeffer does not deny God. The God who is with us forsakes us because He loves us. He allows Himself to be edged out of the world and onto the cross.

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32. Ibid., p. 198.

33. Ibid., p. 171.

34. Larry Shiner, "Toward a Theology of Secularization," The Journal of Religion, 45, No. 4, (October, 1965), p. 290.

He suffers at the hands of godless men and thereby He is with us and helps us. Theology is important to Bonhoeffer; it is irrelevant to Van Buren.

Man is challenged to participate with God by plunging himself into the world and suffering at the hands of godless men. This is faith for Bonhoeffer. This is the way in which a Christian is to live in a secular age. For Van Buren the "blik" is all important. In a discernment situation a man is "grasped" and thereby given freedom and a new perspective by which to view the world. He then is free to give himself to the world in service.

Van Buren's idea of Christian life in a secular age does not do justice to Bonhoeffer's idea. In the first place, what is it that "grasps" us? He speaks of "contagious freedom." But is contagion appropriate? What sort of a word is it? It sounds as though some power "beyond" man is affecting him. And why should anyone in his right mind choose the way of the Cross simply because he had been struck by freedom? If the historical is all important why should one want to be crucified? As a free man Jesus could certainly have found other ways to be of service to man. "Contagious freedom" lacks any sense of the imperative. It sounds as though one is to sit around and wait until he gets hit with a "blik." It lacks depth. For Bonhoeffer the call of Christ is an imperative. Man is not granted "freedom" and "perspective" in order to be of value and service to other men. Rather he is called to step out in concrete obedience. He is called to break with a secure past and plunge himself into

absolute insecurity - the absolute insecurity of suffering with God at the hands of godless men; the absolute insecurity of the cross. It is here that man gains freedom. Freedom comes because a man follows. Freedom is not granted in order that a man may follow.

It would seem as though Bonhoeffer's secular man is much more mature than Van Buren's. Van Buren's secular man is still dependent on being "grasped" by a "blik." This certainly hints at something beyond man. Bonhoeffer's secular man can rely on no such crutch. He is considered mature enough to get on without God.

Van Buren offers man a world without God, where his highest possibility is to catch the "contagious freedom" of Christ. Bonhoeffer offers man a world with God. But a God who considers man mature enough to live without Him because He loves him. The two are not the same. Given a choice I would choose the latter.

I do not feel that Van Buren does justice to Bonhoeffer's non-religious question. His approach is certainly radical and noteworthy, but he fails to adequately answer Bonhoeffer. Further study of his method may eventually lead to a more adequate answer. That would be our wish.

G. SUMMARY

Van Buren sets out in his book The Secular Meaning of the Gospel to answer Bonhoeffer's disturbing non-religious question. He does so by the method of "linguistic analysis." By this method

language is clarified by examining the way words are used. Statements that cannot meet the requirements of the verification principle of linguistic analysis are declared "meaningless." By this method the word "God" must go.

Van Buren criticizes conservatives for their failure to face modern ways of thinking and liberals for their failure to retain Christianity.

He suggests that the one "meaningful" way to speak of Jesus is that he was a "remarkably free man." And the faith exercised by the disciples was made possible by the Easter event. At this time Jesus' freedom became contagious. The faith then expressed by the disciples was a "blik" - a statement that is not subject to empirical proof but has its own validity as an individual's interpretation of existence. This "blik" enabled the disciples to see the whole world in a new perspective - the perspective of the historical Jesus and the Easter event. The disciples were then free to serve others. The contagion of Easter continues to set men free and to give them a Christian perspective of all of life.

Van Buren, however, does not adequately answer Bonhoeffer's question. He does not offer to man the maturity that Bonhoeffer does but rather the possibility of being "grasped" by the Christian "blik." The fact remains, however, "that Van Buren has written a courageous, naughty, important and disturbing book...."³⁵

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35. William Hamilton, op. cit., p. 1208.

CHAPTER V

HARVEY COX AND THE SECULAR CITY

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HARVEY COX AND THE SECULAR CITY

A. INTRODUCTION

Another man who has made a serious attempt at giving an answer to Bonhoeffer's question is Harvey Cox. He says:

We must learn, as Bonhoeffer said, to speak of God in a secular fashion and find a nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts. It will do no good to cling to our religious and metaphysical versions of Christianity in the hope that one day religion or metaphysics will once again be back. They are disappearing forever and that means we can now let go and immerse ourselves in the new world of the secular city.¹

Presently, Cox is an Associate Professor of Theology and Society in the Divinity School at Harvard University. His very provocative book The Secular City is causing a considerable stir among "scholars as well as journalists, theologians as well as social scientists, Catholics and Jews as well as Protestants."² Interestingly enough, the book was commissioned and was intended as a study book for use during 1965 by the National Student Christian Federation. The stir therefore must have come as an unexpected surprise to the author.

Cox cannot be classified among the "God is dead" theologians, He clearly states,

...I happen to believe that God is alive and kicking.³

Cox does not focus his attention upon the question of God's being

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1. Harvey Cox, The Secular City, (New York:Macmillan, 1965), p. 4.
2. Paul Lehmann, A Review of The Secular City by Harvey Cox, Religious Education, 61, No. 2, (March-April 1966), p. 140.
3. "Religious Education in the Secular City," A Symposium, Religious Education, 61, No. a, (March-April 1966), p. 110.

alive or dead, but rather upon the "secular epiphanies" of modern society. From this stance he then seeks to "speak of God in a secular fashion." He writes:

We need to focus the vision of the biblical tradition not on the sycophantic "He's dead - he isn't" stalemate but on those secular epiphanies where the new man and the new society are bursting forth in the thick of today's sexual, literary, racial and economic transformations. We need a...theology that is political in this grandly inclusive sense, i.e., focusing on the polis, the milieu where man becomes man.⁴

In his book The Secular City, Cox provides us with such a focus. Of the book, Tyson says:

A continental theological nurture, comprehensive in reference, informs the writing. The reader may suppose with confidence that a rich contact has been made between the author and the varieties of modern experience.⁵

Greely calls it

...an Americanized version of Bishop Robinson's marriage of Bonhoeffer and Tillich.⁶

The question which we will seek to answer is: Does Cox adequately answer Bonhoeffer's question? The chapter will be divided into four main sections. They are: Secularization; The Secular City; God and the Secular Man; Comparison with Bonhoeffer. Following these four sections will be a summary.

B. SECULARIZATION

Cox uses two terms to describe the ethos of our modern era. They are secularization and urbanization. By secularization Cox means

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4. Harvey Cox, "The Place and Purpose of Theology," The Christian Century, 83, No. 1, (January 5, 1966), p. 8.
5. Ruel Tyson, "Urban Renewal in the Holy City," A review of The Secular City by Harvey Cox, Anglican Theological Review, 48, No. 1, (January, 1966), p. 80.
6. "The Secular City," An exchange of views between Andrew Greely, Michael Novak, Harvey Cox and Daniel Callahan, Commonweal, 83, No. 6, (November 12, 1965), p. 181.

the following:

...it is the deliverance of man "first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language." It is the loosing of the world from religious...understanding of itself, the dispelling of all closed world-views, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols. It represents...the discovery by man that he has been left with the world on his hands.... Secularization is man turning his attention away from worlds beyond and toward this world and this time.... It is what Bonhoeffer in 1944 called "man's coming of age."⁷

By urbanization, Cox means to describe the context in which secularization is occurring. It describes the shape of our modern secular society. Cox says:

Urbanization means a structure of common life in which diversity and the disintegration of tradition are paramount. It means a type of impersonality in which functional relationships multiply. It means that a degree of tolerance and anonymity replace traditional moral sanctions and long-term acquaintanceships. The urban center is the place of human control, of rational planning, of bureaucratic organization - and the urban center is not just in Washington, London, New York, and Peking. It is everywhere. The technological metropolis provides the indispensable social setting for a world of "no religion at all," for what we have called a secular style.⁸

Cox also describes what he means by our secular epoch.

We live in the day of the technopolis. Cox has chosen the term technopolis to represent a radically new species of human community. Preceding epochs are designated according to their characteristic social forms as the tribe and the town. All three forms are to some degree in existence today. They cannot be said

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7. Cox, The Secular City, p. 2.

8. Ibid., pp. 4,5.

to be merely successive or mutually exclusive, "but technopolitan culture is the wave of the future."⁹ It is within this culture that secularization and urbanization are placed as demands upon modern man. Man is forced to "come of age;" man is forced to be mature.

Within the culture of the so-called Christian West, secularization first arose. This is not at all surprising to Cox for he sees secularization as "the legitimate consequence of the impact of biblical faith on history."¹⁰ This emphasis is extremely significant for today's Christian man. Lehmann writes:

The thrust of the book is the claim that there is a positive relation between biblical and Christian faith and the world of technology and urbanization. The importance of this thrust is that the next generation in the United States is being asked to note that the Christian stance in culture and society is neither obscurantist nor rejectionist but world affirming in the biblical sense that God, having gone to the trouble to create and to redeem the world, has not only not rejected it, but is bringing his purposes for the world to fulfillment.¹¹

Cox describes secularization as a historical process that has its source in the Bible. In doing so he makes a clear distinction between secularization and secularism. Secularism is not a historical process but an ideology that functions as a new religion. He says:

Secularization implies a historical process almost certainly irreversible, in which society and culture are delivered from the tutelage to religious control and closed metaphysical world-views. We have argued

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9. Ibid., p. 6.

10. Ibid., p. 17.

11. Lehmann, op. cit., p. 140.

that it is basically a liberating development. Secularism on the other hand, is the name for an ideology, a new closed world-view which functions very much like a new religion.¹²

Three elements in the biblical faith have each given rise to one aspect of secularization: First, the disenchantment of nature which begins with the Creation. Second, the desacralization of politics which begins with the Exodus. Third, the deconsecration of values which begins with the Sinai Covenant.¹³

By the disenchantment of nature Cox means the driving out of all forms of magic from our world. He says:

The Genesis account of Creation is really a form of "atheistic propaganda." It is designed to teach the Hebrews that the magical vision, by which nature is seen as a semidivine force, has no basis in fact. Yahweh, the Creator, whose being is centered outside the natural process, who calls it into existence and names its parts, allows man to perceive nature itself in a matter-of-fact way.¹⁴

This freeing of nature from magical and religious overtones provides an absolute precondition for the development of natural science. Man can now face the natural world unafraid.¹⁵

By the desacralization of politics Cox means that "no one rules by divine right in secular society. In presecular society, everyone does."¹⁶ The social change that took place at the Exodus was a massive act of "civil disobedience." Cox says:

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12. Cox, The Secular City, pp. 20, 21.

13. Ibid., p. 17.

14. Ibid., p. 23.

15. Ibid., p. 24.

16. Ibid., p. 25.

It was an act of insurrection against a duly constituted monarch, a pharaoh whose relationship to the sun-god Re constituted his claim to political sovereignty.¹⁷

This act provided a symbol of the setting free of mankind from sacral-political history into history and social change.

By the deconsecration of values Cox means that no longer can any values be given ultimate or final significance. Rather, they must be relativized. This realization is rooted in part in the biblical opposition to idolatry. Cox says:

Beginning with the prohibition against "graven images" which is part of the Sinai Covenant, the Old Testament is characterized by an uncompromising refusal to allow any replication of the deity.... Since, for the ancients, gods and value systems were the same thing, this interdiction has real import.... It means that the Jews were forbidden to worship (that is, to take with any real moral seriousness) anything which could be fashioned by man himself.¹⁸

Relativization is of course dangerous, in that it tends towards anarchy and nihilism, but it is necessary as a stage in the process of mans maturation. Cox says:

...value systems, like states and civilizations, come and go. They are conditioned by their history and claim no finality.... Secularization places the responsibility for the forging of human values, like the fashioning of political systems, in man's own hands. And this demands a maturity neither the nihilist, nor the anarchist wishes to assume.¹⁹

Secularization is therefore seen as a historical process which began with God's activity at Creation, Exodus and Sinai. The demand upon today's man is for maturity. This is the task of the Church - to call men to maturity.

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17. Ibid., p. 26.

18. Ibid., p. 32.

19. Ibid., p. 49.

C. THE SECULAR CITY

Before moving on to Cox's secular understanding of God a brief description of his secular city is warranted. The coming of the secular city is cause for celebration and not for concern.

1. Its Shape

The social shape of the secular city consists of two characteristic components: anonymity and mobility. Anonymity liberates man from the Law. Cox says,

For many people it is a glorious liberation, a deliverance from the saddling traditions and burdensome expectations of town life and an entry into the exciting new possibilities of choice which pervade the secular metropolis.²⁰

"Mobility is closely linked to social change; so guardians of the status quo have always opposed mobility."²¹ But mobility is characteristic of Yahweh on the move with his people and of Jesus who by His Ascension refused to be localized or spatially restricted.

2. Its Style

Two terms describe the style of the secular city. They are: pragmatism and profanity. By style Cox "refers to the way a society projects its own self-image, how it organizes the values and meanings by which it lives."²²

Pragmatism means that the secular man asks the question "Will it work?" He is no longer interested in mysteries. He is concerned with the practical solutions of concrete problems.

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20. Ibid., p. 49.

21. Ibid., p. 52.

22. Ibid., p. 60.

Profanity describes the "disappearance of any supramundane reality defining his life."²³ The secular man is definitely this-worldly. That means that he is therefore of necessity non-religious.

3. The Church in the Secular City

We live in an age of accelerating change and therefore the Church needs a revision of its static theology. Cox suggests that the Church develop a "theology of politics, and in particular a theology of revolutionary social change."²⁴ He says:

We must be ready to react to new realities in history by discarding even our most cherished ideas and accepting new ones, later to be sacrificed again.... We are always becoming mature and responsible stewards. Permanent revolution requires permanent conversion.²⁵

Within this revolutionary age the Church is called to act as God's avant-garde. Its task is three-fold. It includes kerygma or proclamation, diakonia or servanthood for the sake of bringing healing and reconciliation to the world, and koinonia or demonstration of the character of the new society.

Finally, Cox describes the Church as "cultural exorcist." Men are being called to adulthood and they must therefore be set free from infantile images of the past. "Exorcism is that process by which the stubborn deposits of town and tribal pasts are scraped from the social consciousness of man and he is freed to face his world matter-of-factly."²⁶

The Church is therefore very much needed in the secular city. The Christian whose life is shaped by biblical faith should in fact be the most adequately prepared person to participate in this

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23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., p. 107.

25. Ibid., p. 122.

26. Ibid., p. 154.

new age. Tyson says:

The singular merit of this book is that it presents strong support for those whose orientation is shaped by biblical faith. Within the economy of Cox's theological perspective participation in the urban world is legitimate for Christian folk.²⁷

D. GOD AND THE SECULAR MAN

Cox concludes his book by turning his attention to Bonhoeffer's tormenting question. "We are proceeding toward a time," he wrote, "of no religion at all.... How do we speak of God without religion...? How do we speak in a secular fashion of God?"²⁸

Cox suggests that Bonhoeffer's question is tormenting because of two incontrovertible facts. The first is that biblical faith requires that we speak of God and the second is that the word "God" is meaningless to modern secular man.

Bonhoeffer supplies a clue for where to start in overcoming this impasse. Cox quotes from his commentary on the Second Commandment:

"God" is not for us a common concept by which we designate that which is the highest, holiest and mightiest thinkable, but "God" is a name. It is something entirely different when the heathen say "God" as when we, to whom God himself has spoken say "God"... "God" is a name.... The word means absolutely nothing, the name "God" is everything.²⁹

The Bible does not present to the reader a concept of God. Rather, the Bible simply names God. That is, He is pointed to, confessed and located in terms of our history. That means that

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27. Tyson, op. cit., p. 88.

28. Cox, The Secular City, p. 241.

29. Ibid., pp. 241, 242.

the act of naming is more than a theological or linguistic problem. Cox suggests that it involves three things. To speak in a secular fashion of God involves a sociological problem, a political issue and a theological question.

1. Speaking of God as a Sociological Problem

All words, including "God" arise from a particular sociocultural setting. They are not handed down to man from heaven. Therefore to speak of God in a secular fashion will be in part a sociological problem. Words continually change their meanings. Historical change produces such equivocation. But equivocation is also a product of social differentiation. The same word may mean different things in different settings.

For centuries the word "God" has been used to translate different terms, including the theos of Greek philosophy, the Deus of Western metaphysics, and the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible. Historical change and social differentiation have now made the term the most equivocal of all.

Cox calls secular man to drop all ideas of God and turn to "the One who discloses Himself through the biblical witness."³⁰ This is extremely difficult because tribal usage of the term, where man experienced God as one of the gods, and town usage of the term, where man perceived God as a part of one unified structure including both God and man, still linger on. Cox says:

...if urban-secular man is to meet Him, the God of the Bible must be carefully distinguished from the cultural avenues of perception through which presecular man met Him.³¹

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30. Ibid., p. 245.

31 Ibid.

But how can this be done? Cox suggests that the social context in which "speaking of God" occurs must be altered and the playing out of cultural roles which trivialize whatever the speaker says must be refused.³²

2. Speaking of God as a Political Issue

The Bible deals with historical meaning and act. It is not concerned with metaphysics. But the word historical makes most people think of the past; consequently Cox chooses another term - politics. He defines it in the following manner:

Politics...arises from conflict and social differentiation. It describes the way those societies which have lost a totally unified world-view understand themselves. In our time it has begun to mean...all those activities which go into making the polis what it is.³³

Speaking of God as a political issue will then involve reflecting upon contemporary events to discern God's activity and joining Him in that activity. Speaking of God is therefore extremely concrete, clear, active and productive. Cox says:

Speaking of God in a secular fashion is...a political issue. It entails our discerning where God is working and then joining His work. Standing in a picket line is a way of speaking. By doing it a Christian speaks of God. He helps alter the word "God" by changing the society in which it has been trivialized, by moving away from the context where "god-talk" usually occurs, and by shedding the stereotyped roles in which God's name is usually intoned.³⁴

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32. Ibid., p. 248.

33. Ibid., p. 249.

34. Ibid., p. 257.

3. Speaking of God as a Theological Question

The question of Bonhoeffer's must still be considered as a theological one. Cox chooses the biblical doctrine of God's hiddenness or deus absconditus as central to the biblical faith. Man cannot coerce or manipulate God. God discloses himself as he pleases and as one who is both different from man and unconditionally for man.

In Jesus God is also hidden. He does not fulfill man's religious expectations - rather He meets man as the unavailable "other." In Jesus God is teaching man that he must get along without Him - he must free himself from infantile dependencies and become mature.³⁵

Man, however, still experiences the transcendent, but in a radically different way from the past. God comes to us today as the wholly other in the events of social change. He comes to liberate man. Cox says:

...we meet God at those places in life where we come up against that which is not pliable and disposable, at those hard edges where we are both stopped and challenged to move ahead. God meets us as the transcendent, at those aspects of our experience which can never be transmitted into extensions of ourselves. He meets us in the wholly other.³⁶

But how shall we name God? A symbol drawn from some aspect of social life is needed. In technopolitan culture the symbol seems to be emerging in the work team. Man's relationship to God is no longer participation in Him or confrontation but alongsideness.

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35. Ibid., p. 258.

36. Ibid., p. 262.

Man is called to work together with God. Cox says:

God wants man to be interested not in Him but in his fellow man.³⁷

What shall we name Him then? Cox doesn't know. He suggests, however, that it may be wise to stop talking about "God" for a while until the new name finally does emerge. It will emerge in events of the future. Cox concludes by saying:

Rather than clinging stubbornly to antiquated appellations or anxiously synthesizing new ones, perhaps, like Moses, we must simply take up the work of liberating the captives, confident that we will be granted a new name by events of the future.³⁸

E. COMPARISON WITH BONHOEFFER

Philip Phenix says:

Cox...offers...only a kind of Comtian philosophy of culture spiced with some recent urban sociology and sanctified by reference to Bonhoeffer.³⁹

Such a suggestion would indicate that Cox may well have strayed from Bonhoeffer. We have chosen three issues as a basis for comparison. They are designated as: The Secular, The Demonic and The Transcendant.

1. The Secular

Secularization is Cox's term to describe man's coming of age. He finds a basis for such secularization in the Creation, Exodus and Sinai accounts of biblical history. The terms he uses are the disenchantment of nature, the desacralization of politics, and the deconsecration of values. Here he differs from Bonhoeffer who definitely saw a this-worldly emphasis in the Old Testament,

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37. Ibid., p. 265.

38. Ibid., p. 268.

39. "Religious Education in the Secular City," op. cit., p. 88.

but who by no means used it as a proof text in this manner to support man's coming of age. Cox's usage of the Old Testament is debatable. Bonhoeffer, however, does agree that secularization has come as a consequence of biblical faith. But Cox's clever interpretations of the Creation, Exodus and Sinai accounts remain questionable.

2. The Demonic

Cox calls for a religionless Christianity by "ecstatically hailing contemporary social change as the occasion for a revitalized Christianity."⁴⁰ Cox calls for a "celebration" to welcome modern secular culture with its anonymity, mobility, pragmatism and profanity. One can appreciate his optimistic appraisal of today's world but one cannot fail to be appallingly aware of his failure to deal adequately with the demonic forces within such a culture. Cox hints at the distance between man today and man "come of age," but suggests that the gap is a simple matter of immaturity. Man must be set free from the past - the past with its tribal or town consciousness containing elements of magic, mystery and metaphysics. Social change will effect such a salvation. But sin is more than immaturity. The dangerous and destructive elements inherent in technological power are terrifying. These must be dealt with and conquered.

Bonhoeffer was more realistic. He welcomed the world come of age, but he was always aware that God has been edged out of the world and nailed to a cross. The demonic has done and continues to do its destructive work. The paradox of it all is that the demonic is defeated through the cross which speaks of suffering, death and

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40. Daniel Callahan, "The Secular City," Commonweal, 82, No. 21, (Sept. 17, 1965), p. 658.

resurrection. And God continues to suffer at the hands of today's godless, secular man, but in doing so, He sets him free. Man is not set free by the changing of a social culture to rid him of all references to magic, mystery and metaphysics, although these things may certainly be involved. Man is set free when another loves him, suffers for him and dies for him. The demonic must be reckoned with and consequently death and resurrection will always be central to Christian living.

3. The Transcendent

Bonhoeffer suggested that God is no longer needed as a working hypothesis. Cox would agree. Bonhoeffer asked: How can we speak in a secular fashion of God? Cox answered the question and suggests that we must wait until a new name for God emerges out of the "abrasive experiences of social change."⁴¹ In discussing the naming of God as a sociological problem, political issue and theological question, Cox seems to describe God as culture. Bonhoeffer described him as the Crucified or "man existing for others."

Cox describes the God to whom man must respond in worldly activity as hidden in the events of social change. Man cannot control or manipulate Him. He can only discern Him as He chooses to disclose Himself. God meets us in unexpected moments of human experience. He meets us at the hard edges of life where we are both stopped and challenged to move ahead. "God meets us as the transcendent,

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41. Cox, The Secular City, p. 267.

at those aspects of our experience which can never be transmuted into extensions of ourselves. He meets us in the wholly other."⁴² Such language smacks of mystery and metaphysics.

Bonhoeffer was not interested in boundary conditions. He affirmed that we should look for God in what we all ready know and not in what we don't know. He says:

The transcendence consists not in tasks beyond our scope and power, but in the nearest thing to hand. God in human form...as...man existing for others, and hence the Crucified.⁴³

God is not hidden in events of social change. He is revealed in the Crucified. Transcendence involves existing for others. Man is therefore called to participate with Him in existing for others and thereby suffering at the hands of godless men. The task we choose will be that which will be within our scope and power. Bonhoeffer and Cox definitely differ.

Regarding Cox's emphasis on hiddenness, David Little writes:

...I am mystified by Cox's central theological affirmation that the "unity of our existence is utterly hidden...." The unity of our existence, now revealed in Christ, demands the breaking of barriers and the interrelating of previously antagonistic authorities and groups. The unity or coherence of life is not completely clear, nor is it yet fulfilled. But neither is it any longer hidden.⁴⁴

I do not feel that Cox has adequately answered Bonhoeffer. God who is no longer needed as a working hypothesis is too deeply hidden in culture and urban social change where on occasion He emerges. God seems to be "alive and kicking" although one cannot be certain where he is doing so, but the devil is apparently dead.

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42. Ibid., p. 262.

43. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Prisoner for God, edited by Eberhard Bethge, translated by Reginald H. Fuller, (New York:Macmillan,1959), p. 179.

44. "Religious Education in the Secular City," op. cit., p. 97.

F. SUMMARY

Cox seeks to answer Bonhoeffer by focusing the vision of the biblical tradition "on those secular epiphanies where the new man and the new society are bursting in the thick of today's sexual, literary, racial and economic transformations." From this stance he suggests a political theology that focuses on the polis.

Secularization or "man's coming of age" is described by Cox as a historical process having its source in the biblical faith. Its origin lies in the biblical accounts of Creation, Exodus and Sinai.

The Secular City describes the context in which secularization is taking place. Here a man is called to celebrate the joys of anonymity, mobility, pragmatism and profanity. And the church is called to its three-fold task of kerygma, diakonia, and koinonia.

But "God" is meaningless to secular man and essential to biblical faith. How can we speak of Him now? Cox says that "God" is simply a name that emerges out of a particular socio-cultural setting through events of social change. Therefore we must await His emergence out of events within technopolitan culture. Meanwhile he remains hidden and discloses Himself on occasion as "the wholly other" at those hard edges of life where we are stopped and challenged to forge forward.

Cox has written a commendable book. But he doesn't do justice to Bonhoeffer. They agree that secularization arose as a consequence of biblical faith although Cox's exegesis is questionable. But Cox fails to do justice to the demonic in his glorious praise of the secular city. Sin is almost equated with immaturity and salvation

comes by shedding magical and metaphysical ideas of God through social change. Bonhoeffer comes to grips with the demonic at the cross of Christ. And society is changed through death and resurrection rather than through social change.

The transcendent differs in Cox and Bonhoeffer. Cox's God remains hidden in life only to become transcendent when He pleases through events of social change. Bonhoeffer's God is revealed in the Crucified and is seen in human form as "man existing for others." Cox's God smacks of mystery.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study leaves much to be desired but it provides a beginning for an understanding of the relationship that exists between contemporary American men such as Paul Van Buren and Harvey Cox and their German mentor Dietrich Bonhoeffer. An overall summary and general conclusion drawn from them will follow.

A. Overall Summary

Part one has been a consideration of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's raising of the question of the non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts. The section is divided into three chapters.

Chapter one has been limited to a study of Bonhoeffer's life with an emphasis on those factors that gave rise to the question. His life has been looked at according to the pattern he described in "Stations on the Way to Freedom." Self-discipline, action, suffering and death each added to his movement from pious to the practical, from the church to the world. The non-religious question naturally followed.

Chapter two has been limited to the logic behind Bonhoeffer's raising of the question. It included theological influences upon his thought. Though he differed in some respects from Barth, Barth may be considered as having the greatest influence upon him. It also included an understanding of the basic theme underlying his thought. One can say that his theme was "a growing awareness of the total

meaning of Jesus Christ in terms of concrete life." Finally, it included the development of that theme as it eventually gave rise to the non-religious question.

Chapter three has been concerned with the actual raising of the question as it is expressed in his Letters and Papers from Prison. It began with his emphasis on this-worldliness. It considered his understanding of "religion" and the demand of the Gospel of Christ for a non-religious interpretation. Further, it considered the additional factor of Bonhoeffer's affirmation of world secularization or the "world's coming of age" as a complementary demand. Finally, it concluded by considering Bonhoeffer's fragmentary answers with their emphasis upon a "suffering God" and the Christian call to "participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world."

Part two has been a consideration of the attempts of Paul Van Buren and Harvey Cox to answer Bonhoeffer's question. The section is divided into two chapters numbered four and five.

Chapter four has been restricted to a review of Paul Van Buren's attempt to answer Bonhoeffer's question by the method of linguistic analysis. It presented an analysis of the method as understood and applied by Van Buren. It considered his theological discussion which concluded that the word "God" must go but Jesus of Nazareth must stay. Something "meaningful" can be said about the historical figure Jesus, but nothing "meaningful" can be said about God. Jesus was remarkably free for his neighbor and at

Easter his freedom became "contagious." That contagion continues to grasp men today providing them with an orientation and a commitment to see the world in a certain way. Such an orientation is called a "blik," which provides the basis for the Christian way of life. The chapter concluded with a comparison to Bonhoeffer. Van Buren fails to answer him adequately. He presents a world without God and a world in which it is hoped that man will be grasped by the Christian "blik." Bonhoeffer presents a world with God who provides no such crutch but grants man the privilege and responsibility of living without Him.

Chapter five has been confined to a consideration of Harvey Cox's attempt to answer Bonhoeffer's question. His attention was focused upon the polis and upon those secular epiphanies where the new humanity is bursting forth today. It considered his biblical basis for secularization. It also considered his "celebration" of the secular city with its joys of anonymity, mobility, pragmatism and profanity and its need for the Church to proclaim by word, act and example the true secular man. Further, it considered his answer to Bonhoeffer's question: How can we speak in a secular fashion about God? In terms of sociology, politics and theology Cox declares that God is hidden and at present cannot be named until events of social change declare that name to us. Meanwhile man is to discern the places in society where He is bursting forth in order to join Him in His activity. Finally the chapter concluded by comparing Cox to Bonhoeffer. The writer contends that Cox fails to answer Bonhoeffer. Three points of comparison were discussed. Cox

fails to deal adequately with the demonic elements of secular society and hence fails to come to grips with Bonhoeffer's emphasis upon the Crucified. Cox's God is hidden only to be revealed through events of social change. Bonhoeffer's God is revealed in the Crucified.

B. Conclusion

Among the great men of the 20th Century the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer will long be remembered. His life and his thought which form a unity speak meaningfully to modern secular man. His aim was not to ensure a palatable but rather a powerful Gospel for such a man to give himself to. This necessitated his raising of the question of the non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts. The Gospel itself demanded it; the ethos of modern society demanded it; Bonhoeffer could not escape it. Nor can we.

Paul Van Buren and Harvey Cox realized the demand. But their attempts at answering the question are inadequate. Both attempts, however, provide a significant beginning for an answer to the question. Van Buren and Cox can by no means be brushed aside. Let us hope that as they continue to wrestle with the problem new truth will emerge. It may be that such truth will emerge from a new "blik" or from future events.

Meanwhile, let us who claim the name of Christ continue to participate in God's sufferings at the hands of godless man. Faith doesn't ask for answers - faith acts - and answers arise out of action.

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