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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER TODAY

ABSTRACT

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER TODAY

By

VERONICA ERTIS-KOJIMA

B.A. University of Toronto, 1971

The title of this thesis is "The Significance of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Today". I intend to discuss and show, with the data obtained through research, that the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer addresses individuals and/or Christian communities in today's world in their concern for specific issues regarding Christian and contemporary living. From the data I gathered, I found that Bonhoeffer spoke to three categories of individuals and/or Christian communities; that is, he spoke to theologians and lay individuals within the Christian tradition, to the institutional manifestations of the Christian Church, and to intellectuals outside of the Christian tract. I found that Bonhoeffer's life and thought bore a significant witness to the individuals and/or Christian communities in the categories above, in their concern for critical theology, the identity and role of the contemporary Christian Church, contemporary hermeneutics, religious and political ecumenism, and wholistic living. These concerns are defined more extensively in the Introduction. I intend to show in this thesis that Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks pertinently to the contemporary individuals and/or Christian communities regarding these areas of concern and confronts his audience with a theological orientation that is critically seeking to actualize the Christian message of liberation and reconciliation on the basis of justice.

The thesis is divided into six chapters and an introduction. In the Introduction I establish the conditions necessary for theology to retain a viable and credible role in today's world. A very integral part of these conditions is that theology (including Christian communities and believers) must confront and begin

to answer the concerns that believers, Christian communities and individuals outside the Christian traditions, consider important. These concerns are those defined above as, critical theology, the identity and role of the contemporary Christian Church, contemporary hermeneutics, religious and political ecumenism and wholistic living. I show that Bonhoeffer was aware of these problems and was beginning to answer them himself. In this manner I establish the theological starting point for this thesis. In Chapters One to Five, I discuss the respective area of concern. First I explain how meeting and resolving this concern is important for retaining an authentic and viable Christian witness. Then I show who has received Bonhoeffer in their attempt to address this concern, and in what way Bonhoeffer has influenced the respective individuals and/or communities. Chapter Six is the conclusion. I have also included a Preface and a Postscript. In the Preface I intend to give the reader an insight of how Bonhoeffer has been important to me in my personal theological development. The Postscript was added because at the time of writing the second draft of this thesis a number of events took place that in some way tied into some of the developments mentioned in this thesis.

THESIS TITLE PAGE

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THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts degree
Wilfrid Laurier University
1981

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: CRITICAL THEOLOGY	10
CHAPTER TWO: THE IDENTITY AND ROLE OF THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH	41
CHAPTER THREE: CONTEMPORARY HERMENEUTICS	60
CHAPTER FOUR: POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ECUMENISM	70
CHAPTER FIVE: WHOLISTIC LIVING	80
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	92
POSTSCRIPT	110

PREFACE

The movies "Godspell" and "O God", set in metropolitan New York and Los Angeles, are attempts at bringing traditional beliefs into a contemporary scenario. Although, these and similar productions have been decried as heresies by evangelical Christians, they are actually effective and powerful approaches in giving a contemporary statement to religious experience. When we speak of the man Jesus, we usually visualize him in the religio-political setting of Judea and Galilee, around A.D.30. Yet, Jesus' life and his words apply to our time as well. And in order to spring the meaning loose into our lives and times, it is necessary to debunk anachronistic religious sentiments and myths. In a similar vein, the question Bonhoeffer posed in his prison letters remains our question, "Who is Jesus for us today?"

For some years, before I had the opportunity to return to university for some post-graduate studies, this question, although not so eloquently articulated, had taken shape inside me. What I sought was a theology that permitted me to live an integrated life: one that affirmed the this-worldly, one that respected the inherent dignity and rights of man, one that had viability in the multi-faceted diversity of cultures, races, ideologies, and one that addressed contemporary political and ethical issues on the basis of justice. Bonhoeffer was instrumental in bringing these prerequisites together into a form of a theology I refer to as "critical theology." He declared that Christian living must affirm the this-worldly, and moreover, it must be directed to this world and grow out of the dynamics of this world.

I discovered later and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, he wrote from prison, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint or a converted sinner, or a churchman; a righteous man, or an unrighteous man, a sick man or a healthy man. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing, we throw our lives completely into the arms of God, taking seriously not only our own sufferings, but those of God in the world... That, I think, is faith; that is metanoia; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian.¹

The this-worldliness of Bonhoeffer's theology is quite different from the split this-worldliness of the conservative evangelical theology in which I was nurtured. The conservative evangelical trend, I concluded, never would or could reconcile the tension of its dichotomized world view. On the one hand, the this-worldly riches and successes were good, an indication of God's blessings and proof that capitalism and Christianity went hand in hand! On the other hand, this world was considered a sinful, fallen creation, with nothing in it that could finally edify man. It was a vision of reality that, in my opinion, was dismal, if not pessimistic, xenophobic, if not downright paranoid. For evangelical theology believes fundamentally that man is inherently evil, that society is full of temptation and that the historical process is escalating to the inevitable, cataclysmic Armageddon. In my early teens, I felt terribly torn between being successful in 'worldly' terms or abnegating it all for a richer spiritual life. It was a protracted emotionally draining battle for me. As I write of it here I can still feel some of the residue of anger, when I consider the time and energy lost, attempting to integrate and reconcile faith and

life with a theology that is fundamentally split. The longer I grappled with it, the more the dichotomy, the hypocrisies, the unrealistic, simplistic worldview and the underlying self-righteous chauvinism became apparent.

The trend in fundamental, evangelical groups is to present larger than life personalities, that make obsequious confessions of faith, for the record, to demonstrate that effective co-ordination of the 'secular' and the evangelical faith can be accomplished. Here Miss Americas, national football and basketball stars, political and other public figures, profess that Christ is the Lord of their life. Stylishly-dressed, financially secure, middle class Americans, (and I include Canadians as well), born again, to be sure, exude a this-worldliness that is a direct endorsement of the status quo.

Moreover, I found it also to be a theology with a limited alternative to social problems. For example, in a recent article in a Vancouver Newspaper, born-again Watergate conspirator, Charles Colson, alleged that the American prison system was virtually ineffective in rehabilitating inmates. On the contrary, the penal system actually created greater emotional and social problems for those incarcerated than it alleviated. His solution was to bring the gospel in evangelical terms to prisoners and get them to repent of their sinful ways. It sounds incredulous that a problem of such complex dimensions, compounded by the immensity of human life at stake, could be written off as simplistically as that. But it sounded all too familiar to me, having heard similar solutions to

other social problems.

In the same vein is the recent commercial on ABC showing a healthy, smiling Debbie Boone, encouraging viewers to send donations to an international Bible society for the distribution of literature and Bibles to third world countries. Contributing to this cause, assured Debbie, is more valuable than donating to programs that supplied ONLY food, clothing or medical aid, because 'saving souls' was a Christian's major priority!!! Yes, the saving of souls at all costs. It is as if, according to the fundamentalistic view, a non-Christian country did not have any religious integrity of its own. In view of the countless numbers of cultures and nations that have existed, flourished and died throughout the ages, it stuns the mind that evangelicals still believe that they have the corner on salvation. Surely there must exist, at least, enough openness and respect for other peoples, to see that each culture finds a way inherently and distinctly its own to approach and integrate the ultimate and sacred in their lives. It was an incident in Japan that brought home this reality for me. I was on a sight seeing trip to the ancient capital of Nara and was taking some shots of an historical Shinto Shrine, when an obviously poor woman stopped in front of the altar of the shrine. She clapped her hands and rang the bell, in the usual Shinto custom, and in an uncommon gesture of emotion fell on her knees, chanting her prayers to the God of the shrine. I wanted to take a picture, but somehow I dared not. There was something very sacred, something intensely intimate happening between the woman and her God. Instead, as I stood

witness to this poignant scene, my mind hammered endless questions at me. "What," I asked myself, "made this woman different from the old woman, black-shawled, fingering her rosary, whom I came upon in an old, dim-lit cathedral in southern France?" Were not the humility, the sincerity, the act of faith similar? Who had the right to determine that the Catholic worshipper was more pleasing to God than this Japanese woman? And how does a mission propose to 'Christianize' a people without alienating them from their historical and cultural heritage? Surely the Almighty honors both prayers although they stemmed from distinctly different socio-cultural experiences. A very good Japanese acquaintance spoke of the difficulty the Japanese had in dealing with many Christian concepts, fundamental to the Christian faith, such as "sin", "the fall of man", "guilt", because these concepts are alien to their way of thinking. When I once suggested to a missionary that perhaps the Eucharist could be given in the form of the ancient meditative art of Tea Ceremony, he returned, "Don't you know that it has Buddhist origins?"

I think what bothered me the most about this conservative evangelical theology was its divisiveness, the way it separated the 'authentic' Christian from the 'pseudo-Christian' on the basis of the born-again experience. One had to be wary of any theologians or academicians, who espoused a warped and dangerous humanitarian view of reality. I recall coming home from college for Christmas one year, carrying Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling, when an acquaintance warned me to be careful with Kierkegaard because it

has not been determined whether he was ever born again. A similar judgement was passed on Bonhoeffer by the German evangelical Church. When church people heard of his involvement in the resistance, many shook their heads and commented, that they hoped he had made his peace with God before his death, because he had obviously lost his faith in his last years. The true Christian spirit should intend to bridge barriers, foster understanding, and be committed to furthering ecumenism. One questions, therefore, how truly Christian an organization or movement is, that makes differences into walls and closes communication and acceptance.

What appealed to me about Bonhoeffer was the rich appreciation he had for the arts, for languages and other cultures, and the quality, which permeated his theology, of a profound love and respect for life and a humble compassion for man. Bonhoeffer wrote simply, and that made him accessible to me as a lay person with a limited background in theology. At this point in my life I admit that there are theologians who say what he did more eloquently, whose theology is more fully developed, and who are more clearly radical than he; but, at the time, he was instrumental in giving me a richer, more profound sense of my faith.

Bonhoeffer observed that modern man had "come of age". The historical process had led man to adulthood. That means, today, the modern individual has the educational resources, the scientific knowledge, the technological expertise, the socio-political options to master most problems he encounters. Man has the potential to create a life style quantitatively and qualitatively

that is beneficial for the human race. He can also denigrate or destroy the human spirit. The direction, by and large is up to man. Man knows that it is not God who will push the button for a nuclear war or hold a grain embargo so that countless innocent peoples suffer. The blame cannot be shifted to a nonexistent God-in-the-sky, the 'deus ex machina'. Man has come of age, has matured and is accountable. The maturing of man and the subsequent emergence of a totally secular society is the will of God. And it will do no good to deny or ignore this reality as Christians, but rather to concern ourselves in making this reality humanly workable by furthering the revelatory elements in it. "The transcendent is not the remote, but that which is nearest at hand." wrote Bonhoeffer. God was to be found only in the other. Christian living meant to be engaged in the transcending act of meeting, accepting, and where necessary, helping the Christ-in-the-other. The church has been one of the last institutions to understand or accept the new irreligious society: a society working from totally secular pre-suppositions. Consequently the churches were slow to find a new religious language and a more convincing role in this secular habitat of contemporary man. Bonhoeffer challenges believers to affirm the this-worldly, to accept it and to find a responsible way to live before God, with God, without God.

The this-worldliness that Bonhoeffer talks about, and which has given me the cutting edge for an integrated life, is based on three factors: justice, responsible action and love. The three factors are the ones I came up with in the formulation of my

own theology, but I must point to Bonhoeffer as the one who gave me direction. From him I borrowed the concept of responsible action. The definition of justice is a Tillichean one which I came across in one of my courses at Wilfrid Laurier, and although it includes the concept of love, I reiterate the necessity of love, because it reinforces the presence of Christ on earth and the Kingdom of God to come.

The concept of justice in this thesis is used in the Tillichean sense, whereby justice is defined as occurring through the establishment of a structure, or the taking of action which enables the greatest amount of "power" and the greatest amount of "love" to emerge simultaneously in a particular situation in both the present and the future. As such, "transcendence" occurs, transforming the present towards a more theonomous context.² By responsible action I mean, action in any social setting that fosters and leads towards a just situation. Love is that spirit that binds responsible action to justice. It is that which sees the neighbour as Christ-in-the-other, and impels the wheels of responsible action to move for the sake of justice.

Bonhoeffer, as I have mentioned above is not the only contemporary theologian who recognized the urgency of giving the Christian message a contemporary language and application. Other theologians and religious figures have addressed the situation of our world in a more eloquent, pertinent and viable manner. But, I still see Bonhoeffer as having an important influence, in particular on the (secondary)^{3*} theological level. He did not create any

intellectual fiefdoms as Daniel Berrigan observed, but he did leave a rich heritage of writings and an extraordinary life lending any interested observer a hand in becoming a more aware and sensitive individual.

As far as I am concerned, Bonhoeffer had an influence in the formulation of my personal theological orientation in three basic developments. Firstly, Bonhoeffer was instrumental in directing me toward the world. Rather than writing this world off as unredeemable, Bonhoeffer showed me that this world is loved by God. And that my responsibility as a citizen of this world, and as a Christian is to bring into effect justice, responsible action and love, starting in my home and in my neighbourhood, and from there reaching out to broader social and political scales. I came in this process, to believe that God, rather than being "out there" or "up there", was, in fact, the ground-of-my-being. The immanent permeated the very prosaic, pedestrian moments of my life. Consciously approaching each moment with the measure of justice, responsible action, and love is more in keeping with the will of God than any evangelical proselytizing. Secondly, Bonhoeffer's example of wholistic living has given me a good example of what integrated, contemporary Christian living means and has provided an incentive to bring about a similar integrity in my own life. By this I mean a life that is lived not without its contradictions, mistakes and shortcomings, but one in which the overall concern has been to actualize God's will through justice, responsible action and love. Finally, I think Bonhoeffer provides a good introduction to contem-

porary theology. Bonhoeffer understood the concerns of positivism, liberalism and the demythologizing attempts of Bultmann, but in trying to answer these concerns, he wanted to avoid their weaknesses. Although he never lived to furnish a completed theological formulation, his works do give his readers a basic understanding of these positions. Furthermore, his writings have been a point of departure and a source of inspiration for many more radical theologies, such as the Death of God Movement, Christian Marxism, and Liberation theology. In this way his works can be a starting point for introducing these theological traditions to lay persons. The appealing quality of Bonhoeffer's theology is that it does not dominate, but rather leads one far enough to make his/her own leap of faith, letting them find Christ in the midst of their daily realities.

Because of my personal affection for Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and because, personally, I found him significant for contemporary life and theological reflection, I was stimulated to discover whether history supported my personal experiences and judgements. I was interested neither in perpetuating myths, nor in personality worship or hagiography. What I wanted to discover was, who still found Bonhoeffer a meaningful influence in their own theological, political or ethical concerns, and in what way has his witness been significant for our century. Is Dietrich Bonhoeffer in effect of significance for today?

FOOTNOTES, PREFACE

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. Eberhard Bethge, (London: SCM Press, 1971) p.340.
2. Richard Crossman, "Love, Power and Justice," Lecture, Current Ethical Issues, (Jan. 1978).
3. Bonhoeffer never lived to furnish a completed, final theological formulation as did Karl Barth or Paul Tillich. This makes it very difficult to arrive at a definite understanding of where Bonhoeffer would have placed himself theologically, especially, in view of the variety of interpretations that draw on him for inspiration and direction and can substantiate their affinity to Bonhoeffer. This is compounded, moreover, by the fact that Bonhoeffer's theology does not achieve a systematic harmony, but moves radically from a traditional understanding of the Church and Christian witness to a revolutionary vision of Christian life. Consequently, a somewhat tenuous quality about where he really stands remains and precludes his theological works from taking a primary role in theo-ideological discussion.

INTRODUCTION

The task of theology, if it wants to retain credibility and an important voice in the dynamics of the twentieth century society, in both the industrial nations and the third world, is to develop the ability to speak to and about man where he is found. This means that at the most fundamental level, it is necessary to find a way to speak to man about God in a language that the contemporary individual relates to and understands. This means translating the gospel into contemporary terms, as well as redefining theological concepts such as sin, salvation, evil, grace and so on, in a more pertinent context.

Equally as important as finding a new language is the need to address the situations in which today's individuals find themselves. This means speaking to the sociological, political, economic and psychological realities which they face in an ethical idiom which is based on the principle of justice. This means coming down with a 'yes' or 'no' to the issues of the day; it means often taking a leading and perhaps unpopular stand against unjust situations; it means raising the consciousness of those who are the victims of discrimination, oppression and other forms of injustice, as well as those who perpetrate these injustices, leading both groups to a new identity and the awareness of reality and hope. Theology's task is to participate in the mediation of the message of reconciliation and salvation at the very practical level of everyday living in socio-political terms.

To say 'God is love' or 'Jesus saves' or 'your sins are forgiven' is too abstract and utterly meaningless to a tribesman haunted by hunger and the threat of industrial impingement on his

territory, or to the urbanite crushed by the alienating structures of a megalopolis. The terms, 'God's love', 'salvation', 'forgiveness' must be converted to apply directly to the sociological, economic, political and psychological exigencies these individuals encounter, if they are to take root and liberate and humanize society. As Gustavo Gutierrez explains,

A theology that is not up to date is a false theology... (the Christian) will be someone personally and vitally engaged in historical realities with specific times and places. He will be engaged where nations, social classes, people struggle to free themselves from domination and oppression by other nations, classes and people. In the last analysis the true interpretation of the meaning revealed by theology is achieved only in historical praxis.¹

The question may be asked why should theology strive to retain credibility as an important voice in today's world. Perhaps theology has truly lost its 'raison d'être' and become an anachronism. This is where faith comes in. The believer believes in God. He believes that God will fulfill his promises to man. He believes that God is loving and just, so that God's will for, and presence in the world are directed towards manifesting and fulfilling justice and love for man. It is God's will, in my statement of faith, that man fully realise his humanness in the midst of this earthly creation. Faith mediates the bond between man and God. But faith alone is ineffective. Faith must be affirmed by action. Faith believes that God loves man, and action translates that love into concrete terms. Sin is not so much a lack of faith, but wrong action; that is, the deliberate and often unconscious violation of God's will and love for humanity. This is manifested by personal or communal acts that are oppressive, aggressive, discriminatory,

exploitative and otherwise dehumanize people. Implicit in the act of sin is a whole consciousness, a whole symbol of reference that contravenes the godly principle of love and justice.

The task of theology, of the individual believer and of the institutional manifestations of the church is to implement faith through action, against sin. It is to constantly seek how God's will and love can become actualized in the realities of today's world. The need for theology still remains, for man will always need to hear and learn how God's love speaks to his situation, until 'sin' is eradicated. However, in order for theology's voice, and the channels it speaks through to retain credibility and authority to the often uncaring, unbelieving and critical ears of today's citizens, it must proclaim the gospel of love and liberation in political terms. It must combine faith with action.

Among the theologians who recognized and understood the radical change theology must undergo in its language and orientation was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The overriding concern of Bonhoeffer's theology was to make Jesus Christ real to the hearer. It was most particularly in his latter thought that this concern received full expression. In Letters and Papers from Prison he asks the still pertinent question for the believer today,

What is bothering me incessantly is the question, what Christianity really is, or indeed, who Christ really is for us today?²

And he goes on to ask, "How can we speak of God - without religion... how do we speak in a secular way about God?"³

Bonhoeffer understood that the end of the 19th century was the demise of the traditions, worldviews and institutions that

were an integral part of the 19th century way of life. Industrialization and technocratization had created a new kind of society, with a different ethos, and consequently a new kind of man, man who in his intellectual and technological sophistication refuted the need for God. This for Bonhoeffer did not call for the demise of God, but rather the demise of religion and the way the churches had spoken and understood God, as well as how they understood their role in society.

God was not the 'deus ex machina', the stop-gap God, separated from this world, but instead, was present in the dynamics of the world. God was not to be met in church only, if at all, but through living and participating in the struggles and sufferings in our own lives and more so, in the lives of our sisters and brothers. Bonhoeffer stressed that the churches need to revamp their theologies in order to bring a convincing message of the love of God to the contemporary world. It meant a radical change of consciousness, where sacred and profane were no longer separate, but rather, where the sacred was fulfilled and manifested through the profane. It meant forsaking the traditional religious language for one that emerged out of the milieu in which one lived and worked, a language that addressed the current issues in an ethical idiom.

The task theology faces today is the one of which Bonhoeffer spoke. Because of this Bonhoeffer's works are still studied today. Bonhoeffer directed his writings largely to the theologians and the Confessing Church, and it is the churches and those within the Christian faith that make most use of him. However, intellectuals outside of the churches have also found in

Bonhoeffer's thought seminal currents and utterances which tie into the developments of their own political and sociological positions. For these reasons, Bonhoeffer had retained a position of marked significance today.

When Dietrich Bonhoeffer died at the age of 39, in 1945, he left behind a number of theological writings and the testimony of an exceptional Christian life. Although his thought was never systematically organized, many of his works, in particular his latter thought, have spoken to the world perhaps more eloquently and powerfully after his death than before it.

In the three decades since his death his works have been collected and published in America, across Europe, Africa and as far east as Japan. The unique character of Bonhoeffer's appeal is that he has drawn diverse audiences, who find his thoughts relevant within the context of their own thinking and living. He speaks to Catholics as well as Protestants, theologians as well as lay persons, the orthodox as well as the avant-garde believer, the agnostic as well as the Christian, those living under fascist dictatorships and those in the 'free' world.

The multifaceted and influential impact of his life and thought achieved significant enough proportion, so that an International Bonhoeffer Society was established in Dusseldorf, Germany in 1971. Through annual conferences, participation in the American Academy of Religion and a symposium sponsored by the World Council of Churches, the society has gained official international recognition.

Part of the reason for Bonhoeffer's immense appeal to

such a diverse audience is due to the fact that his work is fragmentary and defies systematic harmony. Bonhoeffer's death cut short any hope for the development of a complete theological formulation. Furthermore, his thoughts were influenced and shaped by the various events that were thrust upon his life. As a result Bonhoeffer did not have the time to concentrate only on the completion of his theological position. Therefore, there arises a difficulty in defining the 'true' Bonhoeffer. There exists a certain freedom as well as ambiguity in interpreting him so that each interpretation depends on who is interpreting him. Peter Vorkink compares Bonhoeffer's theological interpretation to a Rorschach test, where no two commentators see the same thing:

Bultmann's disciples see Bonhoeffer's work as the creative application of demythologization; Tillichians discover that the world come of age has affinities to a theonomous audience; Barthians find in his thought the extension of the master's critique of religion; radical theology locates its *textus classicus* in the Letters and Papers; secularists rejoice in his anticlericalism; and mass culture finds in his life and death its needed martyr.⁴

But more importantly, Bonhoeffer's life, and particularly his thought have retained importance because both of these address the concerns that theology, the churches and those within the Christian tract are attempting to address.

Consequently, the theology and life of Bonhoeffer have been adopted by various persons, as a source of spiritual inspiration, as a theological catalyst or a socio-political precedent. Some have appropriated parts of Bonhoeffer's thought as seminal for their own theology; others have adapted his thought to corroborate their positions; and others have found that his life and work

provide a guide line to their own living. In all cases Bonhoeffer has continued to speak to the world addressing each group in a manner that is found to be relevant for its life.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate to whom Bonhoeffer's thought and life continue to speak today, and what concerns it addresses. It is the intention of the writer to show that Bonhoeffer's thought and life bear a significance to today's i) theologians, intellectuals and other believers within the Christian communities; ii) institutional manifestations of the Christian Church; iii) intellectuals and organizations outside the Christian tradition.

Furthermore it is the intention of the writer to show that Bonhoeffer's thought and life address the above in their concern for:

- i. a critical theology, where theology needs to assume an ethical idiom in speaking to social and political as well as personal issues,
- ii. the identity and role of the institutional manifestations of the church in contemporary society,
- iii. contemporary hermeneutics, where the gospel and biblical ideas are translated into a language modern man can comprehend and conceptualize,
- iv. political and religious ecumenism, where a cross-examination of ideas, brings about detente, through which co-operation between various religious, social and political groups can work toward the betterment of human life,
- v. wholistic living, where there exists integrity and synthesis of life and thought.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first five chapters will discuss how Bonhoeffer's thought and life have been significant to theologians, intellectual and lay believers in

Christian communities, to the institutional manifestations of the Christian church, and to intellectuals outside of the Christian tradition, in their concern for:

- i. Critical Theology (Chapter One)
- ii. The Role and Identity of the Contemporary Church (Chapter Two)
- iii. Contemporary Hermeneutics (Chapter Three)
- iv. Religious and Political Ecumenism (Chapter Four)
- v. Wholistic Living (Chapter Five)

Chapter Six will be the concluding chapter, in which an encompassing overview of the significance of Bonhoeffer's life and thought today will be given.

FOOTNOTES, INTRODUCTION

1. Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, ed. and trans. Sister Caridad Ina and John Eagleson (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1973), p. 13.
2. Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison. p. 279.
3. Ibid, p. 280.
4. Peter Vorkink, Bonhoeffer: In a World Come of Age, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 4.

CHAPTER ONE

CRITICAL THEOLOGY

Theology's concern is basically to participate in the mediation of God's word to man. However, too often, the orientation a theology has taken, and the language that it has spoken, were meaningless to modern man. What do - sin and salvation, mean to the citizen in today's world? The traditional theology of mainstream churches has often served to broaden the gap between the theological posture of the churches and the modern ethical, socio-political situations contemporary individuals face. This hiatus has unquestionably affected the believers caught between the theology of their respective church and the realities in their own lives, producing a tension from juggling these dichotomous directions. The upshot of this is all too often an unhealthy disconnectedness on the part of the believer torn between faith and reality. This tension is observed and written off by the unbeliever as the hypocrisy and the self-serving interest of religion. While believers in churches debated about building additional Sunday School halls, upcoming car washes and bazaars, the exigencies in society remained. What was necessary was the emergence of a theological orientation that would confront the church and believer with the urgent truth that their very existences as Christians demanded that they share, namely an intrinsic responsibility to the concerns and hopes of this world.

It is the theological posture of critical theology that, I believe, manages to incorporate these diverse concerns and addresses them. For the dynamic in the heart of critical theology is such that the word that critical theology intends the churches to speak to the world must first originate in a thorough and intelligent understanding of the political, social, economic

currents integral to the issue they seek to address. Second, in light of these conditions, the word must be such that justice is the final concrete result.

I borrowed the term "critical theology" from the Canadian theologian Gregory Baum, who defines the task of critical theology as that of "discerning the structural consequences of religious practice to evaluate them in the light of the church's normative teaching and to enable the church to restructure its concrete social presence so that its social consequences approach more closely its profession of faith."¹ He emphasizes that not only must the church's teaching and practice be congruent with the gospel, but equally as important is the way in which this teaching affects human lives in their social setting. "Critical theology," explains Baum, "enables the church to assume responsibility for its social reality."² It is, in effect, reflection on praxis.

What I intend to show, is that Bonhoeffer's thought has figured in the emergence of a number of theologies that express a similar theological orientation. Bonhoeffer himself was committed profoundly to a theological interpretation of the Word that had relevance to the hearer. If theology was not pertinent it was not theology. "The truest proclamations of Barth" he once wrote to a friend regarding his Sunday School class, "are worth nothing, if they cannot be understood by these children."³

That is why in his catechism class in proletarian Berlin he translated the catechism into a language his students could understand and included questions relating to issues that concerned them, such as the issue of a Christian's posture toward war.⁴ This

is why he strove for a theological basis in the Ecumenical Church, so that she would have the theological tools to evaluate and take a stand towards the issues of that time. Bonhoeffer stressed repeatedly that the church's responsibility was to speak from "the deepest knowledge of the world if it is to be authoritative."⁵ The church has the responsibility to learn the social, economic, political conditions before it speaks.

This understanding Bonhoeffer had of the necessity for a wholesome interplay between the Word and the world resulted finally in a redefinition of what Christian living meant:

...our relation to God is a new life in existence for others, through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendent is not the infinite and unattainable tasks,⁶ but the neighbour who is within reach in any given situation.

The new turn in Bonhoeffer's thinking derived from a theological orientation that finds its 'raison d'être' through involvement with the world.

What has happened to Bonhoeffer's theology varies greatly according to who is interpreting him. However, the continuity exists whether Bonhoeffer's thought is in the hands of a Radical Theologian or a more orthodox interpreter in that, each unmistakably recognizes Bonhoeffer's insistence on making theology relevant.

French Reformed Theologian, André Dumas, in his book, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Theologian of Reality, gives a fairly ontological interpretation of Bonhoeffer's thought. Dumas understands Bonhoeffer's interpretation of revelation as something that is found in reality rather than in some metaphysical realm. Reality according to Dumas is the context in which Revelation occurs. In

order to make this definition clear, Dumas distinguishes between the French word, 'le réel', which is the daily, empirical here and now, with the word, 'la réalité', which is the world restructured by God through Jesus.⁷ Bonhoeffer is the theologian of 'la réalité', where the empirical, three-dimensional reality is given meaning and enhanced by the reality of Christ.

Dumas defines the problem of the contemporary believer as that of being confronted on the one hand by positivism, and on the other by radical demythologization. He hails Bonhoeffer as a liberating force because Bonhoeffer through his theology of reality manages to answer the double theological concern of both these camps, and still manages to bypass their limitations.⁸ "In this situation," he writes, "the creative independence of Bonhoeffer's theological contribution is impressive. Bonhoeffer proposes to free man of this dichotomy. God is always found in reality. God is where men are in the midst of the penultimate reaches."⁹

Bonhoeffer never gave up grappling with the question of what kind of relationship is possible between a theology of the Word and a theology of ontological presence. So Dumas sees him as one who combines both Barthian scholarship with the interpretative task paralleling Bultmann's.¹⁰ The result is that Bonhoeffer, in his painstaking thoroughness, unlocks the conventional understanding of God. This is his enduring contribution to theology. Dumas explains:

But the Protestant tradition has insisted so strongly with Kierkegaard, Bultmann and Barth on God's transcendence over the world. So when Bonhoeffer comes speaking and living God's involvement in the world, he sets on fire the thoughts and

lives of our generation.¹¹

A more lengthy study on Bonhoeffer's theology comes from another European, Heinrich Ott, Karl Barth's successor in the Chair of Dogmatics at Basel. His discussion, in his book, Reality and Faith follows closely the points raised by Dumas. Like Dumas he sees two themes predominate in Bonhoeffer's theology: Christology and reality. Ott, like Dumas, observes that Bonhoeffer's theology is a theology of the ontological presence of Christ.¹² In order to draw a clear distinction between the penultimate reality and the ultimate reality, Ott uses the German words, 'Realität', which means the empirical world, and 'Wirklichkeit' which he defines as the presence of Christ in the ontological structures around us.¹³ Dumas made a similar distinction contrasting the world of 'le réel' with the world of 'la réalité'. God's presence, as Ott reads Bonhoeffer, is intricately woven into the very fibre of the penultimate reality. Ott feels that this brings Bonhoeffer, who saw God as the ground of Reality, close to Teilhard de Chardin who understood the transcendent as manifested within the empirical structures of this reality.¹⁴

Ott, similar to Dumas finds that Bonhoeffer's theological contribution lies in that his thought can act as a catalyst in mediating and liberating the entrenched dichotomy existing in Protestant theology between positivism of revelation and radical individualistic existentialism.¹⁵ By addressing himself to these theological concerns without losing his Christological center, or his concrete understanding of reality, Bonhoeffer's thought will, predicts Ott, continue to speak pertinently to the theological

concerns of the Christian.

Thus over and over again we have found Bonhoeffer exactly at the crucial point of the theological event...The question of the way God is real in the reality we sense today is eminently an ontological and hermeneutical one.¹⁶

Bonhoeffer understood this. His writings, though incomplete, are springboards from which we are given insights to answer these questions for our lives.

A different response, not necessarily breaking with the ontological thrust of the two previous theologians, but somewhat more concerned in the problems of secularization in society, comes from Secular Theologians, John Robinson, Harvey Cox and Paul Van Buren. Paul Van Buren's theology will not be discussed in this chapter, because his book deals with hermeneutics and with the question of bringing Biblical concepts closer to the experience of twentieth-century man. His work is discussed in the chapter on Contemporary Hermeneutics.

In any event, each of these scholars has to some extent studied the problems that secularization has raised for the Christian identity. They have recognized and articulated the discrepancy between modern man's consciousness and the traditional Christian faith. Each of them has tendered a response to this problem, in hopes of narrowing the gap, by giving the Christian message a more relevant and authentic voice in a secular world. Each man acknowledges that Bonhoeffer understood, anticipated and attempted to answer these problems with which they deal, and they refer to him as a major source of inspiration for their works.

Robinson, Cox and Van Buren concur that twentieth-century

man is living in a world in which the traditional symbols have become anachronistic, the religious ones included. It is therefore of vital importance to find a contemporary expression for the gospel, in order that the contemporary individual will feel included and engaged. Cox elucidates the problem in this way:

(Secularization) is the loosening of the world's religious and quasi religious understanding of itself, the dispelling of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols...(it is) man turning away from the world beyond and toward this world and this time. The age of secularization is an age of no religion at all. It no longer looks to religious rules and rituals for its morality or its meaning...We must learn as Bonhoeffer said to speak of God in a secular fashion and find a non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts.¹⁷

It was Bishop Robinson's book, followed by Van Buren's, that generated interest in Bonhoeffer in the early sixties. In his work Honest to God Robinson recognizes the urgency of reformulating the traditional, orthodox supernaturalism of the Christian faith into a context twentieth-century man can understand and to which he can relate. "What looks like is being required of us," observes Robinson, "Is a radically new mould or metamorphosis of Christian belief and practice...(this means) we have to be prepared for everything to go...even our most cherished religious categories and moral absolutes."¹⁸

Robinson calls on three theologians who in his view can help us in the process of contemporizing our faith: Paul Tillich, whose contribution was in showing us that God is not a projection 'out there', but rather the Ground of our Being;¹⁹ Rudolf Bultman, who in his demythologizing of the Bible, attempted to translate the essence of the gospel to modern man;²⁰ and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who helped us understand that the faith of contemporary Christians does

not depend on the premise of religion.²¹ Rather the form our Christianity must take is intimated in his idea of the 'man for others'. "The Christian community," writes Robinson, "exists not to promote a new religion, but simply to be the embodiment of this new being as love. And that means to return to Bonhoeffer's 'participation in the powerlessness of God in the world'."²²

Robinson calls for the development of a new Christology, where Jesus is the true expression of Love as the one who is completely united with the Ground of his Being, and one who could therefore become the perfect example of what Bonhoeffer called 'the man for others'. It was, believes Robinson, such a Christology towards which Bonhoeffer was working.

Robinson also works out his own concept of holy worldliness, and although he quotes from Bonhoeffer, his development is his own. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer's ideas are an underlying but evident thread throughout the book, and Robinson does not undervalue his contribution. He sees Bonhoeffer's theological significance as continuing in the coming decades:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christianity without religion in his Letters and Papers...might be understood properly only a hundred years from now. But it seemed one of those trickles that must one day split rocks.²³

Harvey Cox sees the secularization of society as a natural outcome of the historical process. It is an irreversible process through which man, who has come of age, has broken away from the constraints of closed metaphysical world views and religious presuppositions.²⁴ It is a liberation process by which man, in emancipating himself from the shackles of his traditional world view, comes

into his manhood. Old beliefs must be abandoned in line with changes in institutional structures. For when "man changes his tools, and his techniques, his way of producing and distributing the goods of life, he also changes his gods...Tribal, town technopolitan existence represent different forms of social, economic and political community. As such they symbolize different religious systems,"²⁵ Cox explains in his book, The Secular City. So as Christians, we have a dual responsibility in this. First, we must learn, as Bonhoeffer said, to speak of God in a secular fashion and find a non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts.²⁶ Second, we must cultivate the secularization process for it is liberating man from his dependency on antiquated religiosity.²⁷ For the liberation of man is the outworking of the revelation of God on earth. Cox suggests that to answer Bonhoeffer's question of how we should speak of God to secular man, it is necessary to formulate a political theology.

The first move in answering Bonhoeffer's question is to alter the social context in which speaking of God occurs...We have to focus on political theology because in secular society,²⁸ politics replaces metaphysics as the language of theology.

In Bonhoeffer, Cox sees one who understood and defined the problem but who never lived to furnish a complete solution. That challenge is left to us. In an article in Commonweal, entitled, Beyond Bonhoeffer²⁹ Cox outlines the predominant concerns that face the church today, to which he believes Bonhoeffer's writings provide a pertinent contribution. Cox explains that Bonhoeffer so many years ago had his fingers on the very issues that concern us, and like Robinson, he believes that Bonhoeffer's voice

will continue to be heard in this latter part of the twentieth century, until we, as believers and churches, have answered the questions facing our life and witness today. "We are in no sense done with Bonhoeffer," remarks Cox, "nor do I believe can we move beyond him until we begin to be the kind of church he knew we must be."³⁰

From the camp of Radical Theology the position of Thomas J. Altizer and William Hamilton give us an insight to how far in the theological sphere Bonhoeffer's ideas have been an inspiration and starting point for discussion. Radical Theology or Death of God Theology represents a repudiation of the traditional conception of God and contends that God is no longer a reality in the lives of most contemporary individuals. Albert Camus expressed this through the voice of one of his characters in the novel, The Rebel where he wrote, "Contrary to the opinion of certain of his Christian critics, Nietzsche did not form a project to kill God. He already found him dead in the soul of his contemporaries."³¹ "We must recognize," urges Thomas Altizer, "that the death of God is an historical event; that God has died in our cosmos, in our history, in our existence."³² William Hamilton further explains, "We are not talking about the absence of the experience of God, but about the experience of the absence of God."³³

Radical theology spokesmen insist that the death of God must be affirmed and accepted before Christianity can rediscover new expressions. Now is the time of God's death, the time of accepting the dying of traditional religion and all the old concepts and paraphernalia that went along with it. But, likewise it is the time

of waiting and rediscovering God anew. Thomas Altizer, Professor of English Literature at State Line University New York, and William Hamilton, Professor of Religion at Portland University are two of the spokesmen for this movement. They have co-authored a book, Radical Theology and the Death of God, in which they explain what is meant by the death of God movement. There they elucidate their respective positions within the movement. They see Bonhoeffer as making a decisive contribution in preparing the way for the movement, particularly in his recognition of the breakdown of the religious a' priori and the parallel development of the coming of age of man. William Hamilton states, "at no point is the later Bonhoeffer of greater importance to the death of God theology than in helping it work out a truly theological understanding of the problem of religionlessness."³⁴

Thomas J. Altizer focuses primarily on the development of an appropriate climate for the epiphany. He stresses that the primary prerequisite for this epiphany to occur, is to cultivate and finalize the death of traditional religion and the traditional God.³⁵ Secondly, we must be willing to dwell in a godless world, and dwell in the darkness of the death of God.³⁶ He sees eastern mysticism and the mystic poets, particularly William Blake as sources that will help us prepare and discover the new revelation.³⁷ Altizer demands that after experiencing the ultimate epiphany, we must learn to speak once again of this religious experience in a new language.

Hamilton notes that Bonhoeffer's significant writings for Radical Theology are Ethics and Letters and Papers From Prison.

He defines Bonhoeffer's contribution in two areas. His first contribution lies in that Bonhoeffer recognized that God is no longer a working hypothesis in the twentieth-century mind, and man must accept this and work from there. "Bonhoeffer invites us to accept the world without God as given and unalterable." points out Hamilton. "If there is to be a God for the modern world, he will not be found by renouncing the world that can do without him."³⁸ The second area which marks Bonhoeffer's influence is his plea for a non-religious Christianity. Christian religion must give up its claim as being the only authentic expression of God's will. In forwarding this direction of thought, "Bonhoeffer," writes Hamilton, "is forcing us to shift our center of attention from theology, apologetics and hermeneutics to the shape and quality of our lives."³⁹

In an article in Christianity and Crisis, Hamilton again reiterates the double value of Bonhoeffer's contribution and importance. "Firstly," he states, "he has forced us to move from theology to ethics, and to see the life of the Christian in both private and public political visibility, as the primary evidence for the truth of the message he bears."⁴⁰ Secondly, Bonhoeffer's Christology speaks of a God who, dethroned from his regal position on high, can be found hidden in the sufferings within this world.⁴¹

Hamilton concludes that these themes, that Bonhoeffer began to investigate and for which he offered tentative solutions, are themes that continue to speak to, for and about contemporary persons. Hamilton also sees this movement away from religion as a continuation of the Protestant tradition, begun by Luther, which

originated as a protest against false religiosity for an authentic Christian expression within the world.⁴² Hamilton sees Bonhoeffer as making a valuable contribution for Protestant Theology because his thought can help Protestants understand and accept the continuation of this tradition of protest against false religion.⁴³

Sociologist Peter L. Berger concurs with Hamilton. He remarks in an article in Christian Century,

What makes Bonhoeffer most significant for us is that to the end his thoughts are related to the mainstream of the Protestant tradition...in him we find that challenging application into our contemporary situation of the Protestant Principle...It was religion not the world against which the Protestant witness was first directed.⁴⁴

Although Berger does not speak from within the Death of God movement he sees its position as the logical following through of Bonhoeffer's thought expressed in the Prison Letters. "God is dead, and more and more men are beginning to grasp the fact. We must not be misled by miscellaneous religious revivals, new mythologies, indigenous or imported." exerts Berger. "Bonhoeffer sees the problem of the contemporary believer as that of witnessing to the living Christ in a world in which God is dead."⁴⁵

In his article Berger celebrates the liberation of modern man from the shackles of religion and sees Bonhoeffer's Man living in the world come of age, as the same man that moves through the world of Camus' novels.

Camus presents to us an image of modern man...as an image of joy. Man has attained the capacity for freedom, including the freedom to get along without the deus ex machina, even in the face of mystery and anguish.⁴⁶

However in affirming the death of God, both Hamilton and Berger do not see Bonhoeffer as absolving the contemporary Christian

from his obligation and responsibility to witness to Christ in this world. The Christian has a place to be, and it is in the midst of the ambiguities of this world. It means that one must leave the security of religion and move into the world, not shirking one's political, social and professional responsibilities. It means, that one can live on the basis of personal integrity and not personal expedience in encountering one's enemy and friend. "Here I reflect the thought of the late Bonhoeffer," writes Hamilton. "If there is a movement away from God and religion, there is a more more important movement into, for and toward the world, worldly life and the neighbour and the bearer of the worldly Jesus."⁴⁷

When Bonhoeffer joined the resistance movement in Germany, he stepped beyond the traditional boundaries of Christian responsibility, and broadened the parameters of Christian witness. Bonhoeffer had learned that a Christian's scope of action could not be relegated to only church life or non-political action, but must in a secular world, be directed to participating, in a responsible way, in the hopes and needs of man in all aspects of his/her life. Christian responsibility extends to the social, political and physical conditions of the neighbour. By his own example and through the social ethics expressed primarily in his book Ethics, Bonhoeffer's thought on the Christian's political responsibility ties in with the spirit and direction of critical theology. Critical theology demands that the churches and believers constantly assess the degree of justice in any situation, and like Bonhoeffer, in the case of any abrogation of justice, rally to support the victims as well as act to impede the process of injustice. For

Bonhoeffer, helping the few scattered victims of Nazi oppression was no longer enough. Besides he had been stripped of any professional status by the German government, thereby blocking other forms of opposition. The evil designs of Hitler's regime had created a cataclysm of human tragedy, destroying nature, human lives, and countries. Bonhoeffer saw no other recourse available to him, other than as a Christian, to commit himself to the overthrow of an heinous government for the sake of furthering God's revelatory function through a just society.

Bonhoeffer's expression of resistance against fascist oppression, as a leading spokesman for the Confessing Church and later in his cloak and dagger existence for the Abwehr has attracted substantial scholarly interest as well as provided a precedent for those who find themselves confronted with a similar situation.

As early as 1933, Bonhoeffer, in response to the Aryan Clause, outlined three ways in which the Christian must act towards the state in regards to measures in which it is found incompatible with Christian principle. The final step he recommended was to retard and/or to stop the state's action, if the state remained heedless to other means of appeal. Bonhoeffer understood that this final step entailed personal political action, and he endorsed it only when all other measure had failed.

Bonhoeffer was not a professional revolutionary; in fact, his innate predilection for passive resistance (which he admired in Gandhi's method of Satyagraha) and his stance as a qualified objector to the war, was abbreviated by the jarring events of Hitler's growing tyrannicide and expansionist ambitions.

In Ethics, Bonhoeffer concedes that there are times when one is faced with the "ultima ratio, the Grenzfall, necessita."⁴⁸

In the course of historical life there comes a point where the exact observance of a formal law of a state...suddenly finds itself in violent conflict with the ineluctable necessities of the lives of men; at this point, responsible and pertinent action leaves behind it the domain of principle and convention...and is confronted by the extraordinary situation which no law can control.⁴⁹

He recognized that there are times when the policies of a state prevent man from fully realizing his humanity and so prevent Revelation from taking form within the historical process. Under these conditions the necessary action of the responsible man is "performed in the obligation which alone gives freedom: the obligation to God and our neighbour as they confront us in Jesus Christ."⁵⁰

Therefore right action is not necessarily in compliance with the law of the state or with some abstract ethical principle but is instead a response arising out of the contextual exigencies of the moment. Bonhoeffer states,

The responsible man acts in the freedom of his own self without the support of men, circumstances or principle, but with a due consideration for the given human and general conditions and for the relevant question of principle.⁵¹

The individual who acts according to the dynamics and exigencies of a specific reality acts in accordance with the will of Christ.

Bonhoeffer also realized in his later theological development that although one may not be a consciously committed Christian, one's action, nevertheless can be Christ-like and further the messianic event. He discusses this aspect briefly in Ethics⁵² and

refers to it as "unconscious Christianity" in Letters and Papers.

Larry Rasmussen, currently teaching Moral Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C., investigates the relationship between Bonhoeffer's theology and political activity in his book, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance. He finds that Bonhoeffer's resistance was the existential playing out of his Christology. Changes in his Christology showed subsequent changes in his political commitment.⁵³ The more Christocentric he became, the more he became aware that the world was the area of Christian responsibility. This Christocentric reading of reality affected his mode of decision making, and Bonhoeffer consequently shifts from "provisional pacifist, to selective conscientious objector, to agonized participation".⁵⁴ Rasmussen claims that Bonhoeffer's evolution to participation in an organization that was unconnected with the church contributes to our understanding of what he meant by religionless Christianity.

Rainer Mayer's article on Discipleship and Political Resistance is a brief study from a West German perspective on political resistance to racism in light of Bonhoeffer's theology. He notes that early in his life, Bonhoeffer expressed his sympathy for minority groups and the socially underprivileged, and Mayer claims that to exist for others was the underlying motive of Bonhoeffer's life.⁵⁵ It is Mayer's intent to investigate how the use of power can be harmonized with Bonhoeffer's concept of action for the sake of the oppressed and underprivileged. He poses three questions that have arisen in the West German Church regarding this, which he wishes to answer from a Bonhoefferian perspective:

1. May Christians use political force to overcome social injustices?
2. May the church offer assistance to people, Christian or not, who are engaged in a political struggle?
3. Is the Church right in using money collected by taxation (as it is in West Germany) for such ventures?

In response to the first question, Mayer finds that Bonhoeffer would sanction individual participation in revolutionary action, but Mayer interprets Bonhoeffer as vetoing this kind of action for the church as a corporate body.⁵⁷

To the second problem Mayer understood Bonhoeffer as reminding the Church that it is her responsibility and an integral part of her mission to support those fighting for justice, as well as to assist those who are subject to persecution.⁵⁸

Finally he found that Bonhoeffer is more concerned with Christian discipleship than a program for social reform. Moreover, he maintains that any financial contribution to a revolutionary movement, must express the support of all or at least the majority of the members contributing. If it does not, (as is the case in West German churches), it is not a true expression of Christian brotherly solidarity.⁵⁹

The sixties have been called the 'Bonhoeffer decade' because it was then that a Bonhoeffer revival occurred in America, initiated by John A. Robinson's book, Honest to God. However the interest in Bonhoeffer then was not merely theological, for in the late sixties, there arose a growing resistance to the Vietnam War in which America was engaged. Pockets of the American resistance movement to the war found a special kind of bond in Bonhoeffer,

which grew out of an identification with his life and thought.

Robert McAfee Brown was in Switzerland when America intensified her attack on Vietnam. Profoundly disturbed by this action, Brown concludes in an article in Christian Century that Christians today must learn how to sacrifice more than they are accustomed to in order to oppose "the evil policies of an evil government."⁶⁰

I have tried to resist making facile comparisons between Nazi Germany and the United States, but as the Vietnam War has mounted in intensity, the Bonhoeffer experience has seemed more and more relevant to the American experience...and we (in America) find ourselves forced to contemplate resistance activities as the only means of sensitizing the conscience of the nation.⁶¹

Daniel Berrigan, a Jesuit, along with his brother Phillip, engaged in subversive activities against American foreign policy in Vietnam. Upon his indictment by a Federal Court for destruction of draft files, Daniel Berrigan fled, and it is during his flight that Berrigan wrote a poem eulogizing Bonhoeffer's activities as a passive and active resistor to the fascist regime. Berrigan admits that Bonhoeffer had created no intellectual fiefdoms, but that his significance lay in that "He encouraged communities of resistance. He lived in God and with God as though God did not exist, which is to say, as though God were indeed God not score keeper, Band Aid, bonbon, celestial oracle."⁶² Berrigan observes that Bonhoeffer taught us that,

Political man is a synonym for believing man...
Perhaps the matter should be more simply put;
Political man is the natural form of man in his adulthood.

In his eloquent soliloquy, Berrigan concludes:

We have learned from Hitler, from Johnson and Nixon

And the German Church and the American Church
 from the cold war and nuclear arsenals
 from the flare up and quick demise of student movements
 perhaps most of all from one another what for us here and now
 are the limits of equivocal gestures
 The practical growth of heroic understanding in Bonhoeffer's case
 is thrust at us more quickly...
 We stand with Bonhoeffer, whose struggle was more protracted
 who was faithful unto death
 We, too, wish to be both Christian and contemporary.⁶³

In an article in the Expository Times on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Franklin Sherman, states that the significance of Bonhoeffer lies in that he embodied both lines of resistance: political and religious. Bonhoeffer demonstrated that "the Christian is not characterized by a special piety, but by the authenticity and wholeness of his humanity which includes a commitment to the struggle against everything that thwarts other men's humanity. In the conditions of modern life this struggle involves use of political means."⁶⁴

Sherman remarks that Bonhoeffer helped separate and redefine our priorities as Christians from "for God and country" to "for God or country".⁶⁵ And Sherman urges us to be ready to exercise the same intelligent self-critical patriotism as he did.

In the countries where the state has received the churches' collaboration with its policies, such as South Africa, Bonhoeffer's words and activities speak poignantly to believers.

South African theologian and leading scholar on Bonhoeffer in his land, John de Gruchy, has lectured and written extensively on the ways in which the life and ethical principles of Bonhoeffer offer hope to the dispossessed and spur to action those courageous enough to risk life itself for the sake of freedom, and justice.⁶⁶

Tom Cunningham, Methodist theologian, also from South

Africa, resonates closely with de Gruchy. Bonhoeffer's impact is strong upon those individuals and groups struggling for human rights against the oppression and discrimination of the state. "The situation is compounded in South Africa," remarks Cunningham, "because it is not only against a fascist political regime, but also against a church that is ostensibly oblivious to the injustices, and in some respects, participates in them by her silence."⁶⁷ Here Bonhoeffer's words act as an impetus to the conscience of believers by making them aware that the situation in South Africa is a 'Grenzfall' situation that requires them to take up the cross of the suffering Christ, in the form of the blacks and colored, through direct political resistance.

A recent application of Bonhoeffer's thought on the political responsibility of Christians comes from Clarke Chapman, of Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in a paper entitled Vision For a New Day: Bonhoeffer, Moltmann and Liberation Theology. Clarke intends to show in this paper how Bonhoeffer's ethics of action, despite discrepancies and paradox, has become an inspiration to movements of liberation in Latin America. Chapman outlines several aspects of Bonhoeffer's theology which have influenced liberation theology and which have helped communicate the new vision of reality needed to resist oppression.⁶⁸ In particular, Chapman singled out Bonhoeffer's social ethic, which affirms human maturity, the coming of age of man which helps overcome the dualism of the sacred and the profane. Bonhoeffer's recognition of the ontological relationship between the penultimate and the ultimate, clarifies the way in which faith must cope with ideology in a revolutionary set-

ting. Chapman contends that Bonhoeffer's theology can help preserve a sense of transcendence in the Third World countries working for social change, where Christians struggling for significant changes within the political structures learn the costly meaning of the freedom to be for the other.⁶⁹

Bonhoeffer's theology has also penetrated to communist countries and has been interpreted by Marxist Christians and a-political believers.

East German Lutheran theologian and affirmed Marxist, Hanfried Mueller, has written a book, Von Kirche Zur Welt, in which he gives an interpretation of Bonhoeffer's theology according to Mueller's socialist Christian perspective.^{70*} Mueller calls on the believers and the churches to repudiate the traditional forms of religion, which are bourgeois vestiges and preclude the authentic expression of Christianity, an expression fundamentally congruent with socialist doctrine. He challenges believers to reassess their own faith and uncover elements in it that shackle them to a world view and expression of faith that prevents the Christian faith from truly fulfilling its mission in the socio-political process of liberating man.

Mueller's theology is very beneficial in that it presents us with a new look at what happens to Bonhoeffer's thought in the mind and the heart of Christian Marxists who live and work in socialist societies. It gives a new twist to Bonhoeffer's idea of irreligious Christianity.

Mueller has worked Bonhoeffer's thoughts comfortably into his thesis and insists that Bonhoeffer serves two basic purposes.

First of all, Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity of Letters and Papers is the final vindication of man's freedom from the anachronistic religious world view of the Christian bourgeois west. The coming of age of the world means, for Mueller, the socio-political consummation of the historical process in Communist society.⁷¹

Bonhoeffer's vision of man living in a world without religion is affirmed in socialist countries and is, according to Mueller, the final liberated stage of man's socio-political existence. It is liberated, because the ties of the bourgeois mentality have been refuted and eradicated. In addition, Bonhoeffer calls upon the believer in the western countries to put away the remains of a religious outlook that is no longer an expression of reality.⁷²

This is Bonhoeffer's second significance for Mueller. For he challenges the bourgeoisie to let go of a faith built on premises that are no longer valid and to embrace the socialist world view. He sees Bonhoeffer as a model for the bourgeois believer by inspiring him to reject the bourgeois structures of the Christian heritage and to move toward an expression of Christianity which neither requires a formal concept of God nor the institutional church.

Anna Morawska, a Polish Catholic author, living in Warsaw who has translated a number of Bonhoeffer's works into Polish, insists that Bonhoeffer's work can be more easily understood by Christians in Communist countries, than those in western 'free' countries, because, in Morawska's view, the Christian position in the Communist world is similar to Bonhoeffer's position in Fascist Germany in that the privileged position of the church is taken away and the Christian community is thrown back on its own to reconstruct

a Christianity without religion. Therefore, when Bonhoeffer speaks of the incognito of the believer in an irreligious world he speaks to a situation that applies to Polish Christians.

Bonhoeffer is so exciting because he has dared to anticipate in thought our problem of how to meet Christ in a religionless world...we, who in the midst of atheism do not wish to understand ourselves as agnostic, but feel veneration for Christ; how may we interpret our relationship to Jesus? In Bonhoeffer we see somebody who might be able to help us.⁷³

Morawska interprets his death as symbolically marking the end of an epoch where civilization was built on Christian presuppositions, and the beginning of a new epoch where civilization is built on secular presuppositions.⁷⁴

Another perspective on how Bonhoeffer has been received in a socialist country comes from Carl-Jürgen Kaltenborn, a Baptist theologian-pastor, who sees Bonhoeffer's ideas on the future of Christianity as a voice of hope for the churches in the East. In the German Democratic Republic, atheism is the official state policy, and the church is as Bonhoeffer said, a church without privileges. Nevertheless, Kaltenborn believes that the church can become a critical voice within that contemporary society. He sees Bonhoeffer as a source of courage and inspiration for his people, who need to become the necessary force for human rights in a world dominated by atheistic values.⁷⁵ In the same address Kaltenborn points out that Bonhoeffer's ideas have had a regenerative effect on the Protestant theology in Cuba where the church has learned to accept the post-revolutionary situation in which it finds itself and has adapted her witness and existence within this new habitat.⁷⁶

Bonhoeffer has encouraged, and directed others to discover a contemporary understanding of who Jesus is for man today. "Who is Christ for us today" rings as a jarring question. Indeed, it has continued to reverberate many years after his death, unsettling, awakening and inspiring many to find the answer to that question in their own lives. He has been found a theological friend by many other thinkers who had separately begun to formulate an answer, and in their research, they found in him one who understood, anticipated and began to answer this question. Responses coming from diverse theo-ideological camps, all have found in Bonhoeffer one who encourages believers to come to terms with accepting this world and finding an expression of faith that is authentically in touch with its realities.

The writer contends that Bonhoeffer's thought has been influential to theologians and lay believers within the Christian tradition in their concern for developing a theology that pointed to the ontological presence of Christ. Protestant theologians André Dumas and Heinrich Ott agree that Bonhoeffer makes a valuable contribution to Protestant theology in redirecting us to encounter Christ through the dynamics of this reality. Bonhoeffer removed the dying Christ from the Cross and showed us that Christ is to be found hidden in the sufferings and joys in our own lives, and more emphatically, in the lives of our neighbour. This rediscovery of Christ-in-the-other liberates the Christian to a more practical and invigorating witness. His works have also been instrumental to

theologians and laity within the Christian communities and to intellectuals outside of the Christian tract in their interest in finding a secularized context for the gospel. Bonhoeffer saw the secularization process as man come of age and as a natural outworking of the historical process. In view of this, he called believers and churches to find a new way to formulate the Christian faith in Word and action. Theologians and laity from within the Christian communities and different elements of the institutional manifestations of the churches found that the radical reformulation of faith that Bonhoeffer stressed included responsible action in the world, even political action when conditions demanded it. This political action may entail open or subversive resistance for the sake of justice, or as Bonhoeffer put it in the Cost of Discipleship for the "sake of righteousness."^{77*} Bonhoeffer's understanding of secularism as man living without the religious a' priori has stimulated his accessibility to believers and non believers in communist societies, who see him ideologically closer to their experience than to the western one.

The writer concludes that Bonhoeffer has borne a significant witness to theologians and lay individuals within the Christian tradition, to the institutional manifestations of the Christian church, and to intellectuals outside the Christian tract, in their concern for a Critical Theology. A theology which assumes an ethical idiom in speaking to social and political as well as personal issues.

FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER ONE

1. Gregory Baum, Religion and Alienation, (Toronto: Paulist Press, 1975) p. 194.
2. Ibid, p. 195.
3. Edwin Robertson, No Rusty Swords, (London: St. James Press, 1965), p. 150.
4. Ibid, p. 145.
5. Ibid, p. 162.
6. Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p.381
7. André Dumas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Theologian of Reality, (New York: MacMillan, 1968), P. 183.
8. Ibid, p. 13.
9. Ibid, p. 15.
10. Ibid, p. 18.
11. Ibid, p. 235.
12. Heinrich Ott, Reality and Faith: The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, (London: Lutterworth, 1971), p. 168.
13. Ibid, p. 329f, also p. 273.
14. Ibid, p. 374f, also p. 387.
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16. Ibid, p. 63.
17. Harvey Cox, The Secular City, (London: SCM Press, 1965), p. 2.
18. John A. Robinson, Honest to God, (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 123.
19. Ibid, p. 22.
20. Ibid, p. 24.
21. Ibid, p. 23.

22. Ibid, p. 82.
23. Ibid, P. 23.
24. Cox, The Secular City, p. 20.
25. Ibid, p. 8.
26. Ibid, p. 248.
27. Ibid, p. 112.
28. Ibid, p. 255.
29. Harvey Cox, "Beyond Bonhoeffer," Commonweal Vol.82, (Sept. 17, 1965), pp. 653-657.
30. Ibid, p. 657.
31. Paul Ballard, "Camus and Bonhoeffer," Theology Vol.78, (May/Aug., 1975), p. 420.
32. Thomas J. Altizer and William Hamilton, Radical Theology and the Death of God, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966) p. 11.
33. Ibid, p. 28.
34. Ibid, p. 40.
35. Ibid, p. 11.
36. Ibid, p. 15.
37. Ibid, p. 18f.
38. Ibid, P. 116.
39. Ibid, p. 118.
40. William Hamilton, "Bonhoeffer: Christology and Ethics," Christianity and Crisis Vol.24, (Oct. 19, 1964), p. 199.
41. Ibid, p. 199.
42. Ibid, p. 199.
43. Ibid, p. 199.
44. Peter L. Berger, "Camus, Bonhoeffer and the World Come of Age," Christian Century Vol.76, (April 15, 1959), p. 452
45. Ibid, p. 450.

46. Ibid, p.450.
47. Hamilton, Radical Theology and the Death of God, p. 37.
48. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton, (New York: MacMillan, 1963), p. 239.
49. Ibid, p. 238.
50. Ibid, p. 249.
51. Ibid, p. 248.
52. Ibid, p. 61.
53. Larry L. Rasmussen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance, (New York: Abingdon, 1972), p. 15.
54. Ibid, p. 120.
55. Rainer Maier, "Discipleship and Political Resistance," Footnotes Vol.XI, (Nov., 1973), p. 5.
56. Ibid, p. 8.
57. Ibid, p. 8.
58. Ibid, p. 10.
59. Ibid, p. 11.
60. Robert McAfee Brown, "ABC - Assy, Bonhoeffer, Caswell," Christian Century Vol.88, (March 24, 1971), p. 369.
61. Ibid, p. 370.
62. Daniel Berrigan, "The Passion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," Saturday Review Vol.53, (May 30, 1970), p. 21.
63. Ibid, p. 22.
64. Franklin Sherman, "Death of a Modern Martyr," The Expository Times Vol.88, (Feb., 1977), p. 205.
65. Ibid, p. 206.
66. Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr, (London: Collins Press, 1975), p. 27.
67. International Bonhoeffer Society, Newsletter No. 19, (August, 1980), p. 2.
68. Ibid, p. 5.

69. Ibid, p. 5.
70. Mueller's thesis is also discussed in the following chapter on the Role and Identity of the Contemporary Church because he also discusses the shape the church must take in an irreligious context. Mueller finds points of similarity between the church in secular socialist society and the radical concepts in Bonhoeffer's latter thought on the Church's role and witness.
71. Geoffrey Kelly, "Marxist Interpretation of Bonhoeffer," Dialogue Vol.10, (1971), p. 216.
72. Ibid, p. 216.
73. Bethge, Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr, p. 13.
74. Ibid, p. 15.
75. International Bonhoeffer Society, Newsletter, p. 2
76. Ibid, p. 9.
77. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. R.H. Fuller, (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 103.

In The Cost of Discipleship Bonhoeffer explains the text, "Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness sake..." This does not refer to the righteousness of God, but to suffering in a just cause...It is important that Jesus gives his blessing not merely to suffering incurred directly for the confession of his name, but to suffering in any just cause.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IDENTITY AND ROLE OF
THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

A church's self-identity and the subsequent role she proceeds to play in society depends on the theology she professes. A critical theology will direct the church to the world and cause her to question, whether she is really integrating and speaking to the realities about her. A critical theology will impel the church to move from being a semi-static institution in society to one with committed involvement in the dynamics of change for humanity's sake. It will liberate the church to discover the enriched and multifaceted options through which she can be the agent of reconciliation and liberation to the people within her scope of influence.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood the interrelationship that existed between theology and the role of the church. He was aware that an authentic ecclesiological life is predicated on a clear and concrete theology. At Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer's concern was to provide the seminarians with a good theological basis so that they would be equipped to shape the life and witness of their own parishes. Bonhoeffer supported the Barmen Confession because it defined the theological position of the Confessing Church that was compatible with the gospel. And, he struggled indefatigably along with the French delegates for a theological basis for the Ecumenical Movement, which he regarded as the church on the international sphere. For, without a clear theological foundation, it could not speak authoritatively or concretely to the social and human injustices, and spiritual perversities perpetrated by the Fascist government and Reichs Church. The interdependence between theology and church witness was clear for Bonhoeffer.

There has been some discussion whether Bonhoeffer's theology

was basically Christological or ecclesiological. However, most of the studies on Bonhoeffer come to the general conclusion that his fundamental theological concern was Christological. But, it is a Christology that is profoundly and inextricably tied to his ecclesiology, for the church is the body of Christ on earth. Moreover, Bonhoeffer's Christology is a Christology in motion in which the Lordship of Christ moves from a solely ecclesiological definition toward the radical discovery of the presence of the hidden Christ beyond the boundaries of the church in the whole world.

Episcopalian theologian, John Phillips sees a tension in Bonhoeffer's Christology existing between the ecclesio-centered Christology versus the world-embracing Christology.¹ He believes that this tension is ultimately not resolved or given a neat co-existence by Bonhoeffer. This leaves the church in his opinion, with two radically different definitions of her role and responsibility.² Phillips concludes however, that Bonhoeffer in confronting the church, but not resolving the dilemma, challenges her to discover an authentic and viable expression of Jesus in her ministry. This, believes Phillips, will be his outstanding contribution to the church.³

John Godsey, American Methodist theologian, currently Professor of Systematic Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C., provides a comprehensive exposition of Bonhoeffer's works in his book, The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Godsey also sees Bonhoeffer's theology as predominately Christocentric, and divides it into three periods moving from a purely ecclesiocentric revelation of Christ, through Jesus as the Lord of the Church to a

radical understanding of Christ present in all the world.⁴ However, differing somewhat from Phillips, Godsey sees Bonhoeffer's Christology as a unifying element in his theology that provides a cohesive element in Bonhoeffer's diverse theological writings which provides its necessary continuity.⁵

Godsey believes that Bonhoeffer's theology at each stage addresses the contemporary church. In the first stage (Jesus as the Revelational Reality of the Church), Bonhoeffer has "bequeathed the church an exceedingly rich doctrine of the person and worth of Christ."⁶ In the second period (Jesus as the Lord over the Church), "he has made Protestants conscious of the cost of discipleship."⁷ In the final writings, Bonhoeffer, through his worldly Christianity, directs the church toward a new understanding of the relationship between the church and the world. "In the long run," writes Godsey, "this will be Bonhoeffer's greatest contribution, and it is possible that his thought will lead to a significant revolution of the understanding of Christian faith."⁸

In the introduction of his book, Godsey observes that Bonhoeffer's significance lies in that he helped prepare the way for the church of the future. He sees that through its Christocentric ecclesiological elements it raises the question of how the church is to exist in the modern world.⁹ Godsey understands the radical prison writings as a challenge to the contemporary church, because Bonhoeffer urges us to discover the transcendent as something to be expressed through our lives. It is from this new understanding of the transcendent that Bonhoeffer sees the need to reinterpret the Biblical concepts of repentance, salvation, atonement, faith

and Christian life. Godsey sums up this point in the following way:

Bonhoeffer's theology is one of commitment and involvement. To be a Christian is a way of life in the world...This precludes any spectator attitude toward the world. The church must reassess the context and compass of redemption and come to a more realistic appraisal of the role it plays in God's scheme of things. It must be willing to risk its own existence for the sake of the world.¹⁰

Hanfried Mueller, Christian Marxist from East Germany, hails Bonhoeffer's latter thought as truly expressed only in the context of socialist society. Here the reality is conceived and worked out of irreligious presuppositions, and this forces the church to adopt a radically different life and witness for an authentic and viable existence. Mueller comes from a Marxist Christian frame of reference and points out that Bonhoeffer's theological significance lies in that it reflects a changing socio-political awareness moving in a dialectical manner from a bourgeois understanding of the church to a revolutionary vision of the church in a religionless world.¹¹ In the final stage of Bonhoeffer's thinking, clericalism is done away with, but at the same time responsibility for the world is accented. Mueller contends that Bonhoeffer's ecclesiological vision is accurately redefined from "Gemeinschaft" to "Gesellschaft", where the community of saints is replaced with the godless secular society.¹²

Mueller is not interested in an objective presentation of Bonhoeffer's theology in his book but rather in making use of Bonhoeffer to develop his own position. Therefore he is not concerned about speculating where Bonhoeffer would stand today. Rather he is concerned with defining who may rightfully receive him.

Mueller points to two parties to whom Bonhoeffer's theology is applicable. Firstly, it is significant to Mueller that the Christian Community in the socialist society can relate to Bonhoeffer's theology because it is these Christians who live in an irreligious society, as men who manage their lives without God, who in effect, live before God, with God, without God.¹³ Secondly Mueller says that Bonhoeffer's theological thrust can direct the bourgeois community towards an existence that requires neither the traditional concept of God nor the institutional church.¹⁴

The ultimate irreligious social order for Mueller is the socialist one, where the comrade replaces the neighbour as the bearer of the word, and the socialist society replaces the institutional church as the place where that transcendence is to be experienced and approached.¹⁵ Bonhoeffer is important for Mueller, because as Mueller sees it, Bonhoeffer endorses the shape the churches are learning to take in socialist society, and he sees Bonhoeffer as urging the bourgeois churches to move out of an anachronistic worldview and religious expression.

In South Africa, once again, Bonhoeffer's theology regarding the responsibility of the churches has become the voice of conscience for many South African churches seeking an authentically Christian posture to the gross injustices in their society. In Chapter One we discussed the impact of Bonhoeffer's personal action as well as his theology on resistance, on individual believers in their formulation of a critical theology on resistance. The writer showed how Bonhoeffer's personal witness and his thought have helped redirect and inspire conscientious and critical Christians to move toward

rectifying the injustices in their society on the basis of critical theology. His influence in South Africa is referred to in this chapter again, because it also addresses the relevant concern of the church's identity and role within modern South Africa.

John de Gruchy, President of the South African Chapter of the Bonhoeffer Society and Professor of Theology at University of Cape Town, explains South African churches are finding their political and Christian responsibilities in conflict. For the churches, on the one hand, are partly responsible for creating and entrenching apartheid, and yet recognize on the other hand their responsibility as revolutionary catalysts.¹⁶ The tension this polarity creates is dangerous for the identity and integrity of the churches and cannot easily be resolved, for, the state will tolerate no opposition to its policies, so that those expressing their solidarity with the blacks and coloreds, in various ways, find themselves in an ambiguous and tenuous political and ecclesiological situation, nationally and internationally. De Gruchy explains, "As we listened to Bethge's lecture on Bonhoeffer, it became increasingly obvious how relevant Bonhoeffer's life and thought is for our situation today... Bonhoeffer knew of the tension of working incognito like in South Africa where supporters of the blacks are accused of being communist by the State and have been accused by the Ecumenical Movement as being racist...Bonhoeffer, in the *Abwehr*, experienced this same tension."¹⁷

Tom Cunningham, Methodist theologian from South Africa, concurs with de Gruchy's assessment of Bonhoeffer's importance to the South African churches. In an address given at the Oxford

Conference of the Bonhoeffer Society, Cunningham spoke of the courage Bonhoeffer's writings and personal example had given certain elements of the churches, in their struggle for human rights, in a country still immersed in the unchristian policy of apartheid.¹⁸ These factions of the Christian Churches' function within a world where criticism of government can lead to imprisonment and where informers abound. This situation has forced Christians to make decisive choices for the gospel. The life of someone like Bonhoeffer, who was Christian enough to do something against the structured evil of his own government, gives heart to the churches of South Africa today.¹⁹

Marionist, William Kuhns, in a lengthy book on Bonhoeffer's accessibility to Catholics, maintains that Bonhoeffer's significance lies in that he is one of the few Protestants who crosses the theological boundary that divides Catholics and Protestant thinking, and therefore speaks directly to Catholics as a Catholic.²⁰ He states that Bonhoeffer's accessibility to Catholics stems out of basically three developments of his thought, namely, his understanding of the church as community, his interpretation of the nature of authority and his anthropology.²¹ It is the first two developments that pertain to this chapter and will be discussed here.

The dynamic interplay of his Christology and ecclesiology is the underlying premise in all of Bonhoeffer's thought. When Bonhoeffer speaks of the Church as the body of Christ on earth and as being based upon the revelation of God, he strikes a sensitive chord in the Catholic, to whom the sacramental basis of the Church is a firm conviction. "It is," explains Kuhns, "the secret of his

availability to Catholics and the most promising avenue for pursuing his relevance to Catholic theology...(for) Catholics are more sensitive to the Incarnation as a fundamental mystery than are Protestants."²²

Out of this thought emerges Bonhoeffer's concept of the church as community. Bonhoeffer's understanding of community resonates deeply with the Catholic's innate understanding of being part of the world-wide Church, part of the Catholic community moving with and toward God. The existence of a sense of community is an integral part of Catholic identity. Starting from this point, Bonhoeffer's thought evolves toward an understanding of the Church not only as community, fulfilling God's will within its structures, but as taking an active and responsible role in the midst of the realities of the times. Contemporary Catholics sense a vital need to rediscover Christian community. For the modern Church, Bonhoeffer's works lend themselves to such a rediscovery. He re-directs Catholic thinking of the church as a contemporary community, without devaluing or denying its sacramental basis. For Bonhoeffer, the church exists as community; yet, this community must be part of the world. Kuhns maintains that Bonhoeffer raises a significant challenge to the Catholic:

Bonhoeffer has cut to the central issue of identifying the Church as community (and by providing) a new way of conceiving the church, he has opened up a pathway for reforming it.²³

Bonhoeffer is also concerned about the church's authority. This was a central concern for him, especially in the face of the ecclesiological and political events he found in Germany. For Bonhoeffer, the church's authority derives not simply from God but

from its continued ability to speak to the present exigencies. It must be able to say, "this war is evil," or "we need a social ordering of economics."²⁴ For the church to speak only in abstract principles would be to betray the nature of her calling and lose the authority to speak at all.

Catholics are, by the very structure of their church, subject to authority in the person of their priest, archbishop, and pope. Yet, Catholics experience a growing hiatus between the utterances of their religious leaders in authority and the relevance of these statements in the pressing realities of their personal lives. This discrepancy has raised serious questions about the nature of authority in the church. Kuhns sees that Bonhoeffer's concept of authority may offer valuable guidelines for coming to a fresh understanding of the meaning of the church's authority.²⁵

One of the more recent applications of Bonhoeffer's ethic to the contemporary churches is given by Donald W. Shriver Jr., President of Union Theological Seminary, in a paper presented to the recent International Bonhoeffer Society Conference in Oxford.

In this presentation, Shriver challenges his audience to discover how the churches can be instrumental in fostering a climate of peaceful co-existence and appreciation for each other and the peoples of this world.²⁶ He begins his presentation with Bonhoeffer's question, "What is God doing to us and with his church in America?" Beyond this, he asked what God might be doing to his church in the world. Bonhoeffer's theology, he insists, has the power to turn the mission of the church toward new horizons of

meaning.²⁷

One area in which the church can play a critical role is in helping the refugees from Third World Countries to acculturate to American life. These emigres, coming from politico-cultural backgrounds differing substantially from the occidental historical experience, are less prepared than the European immigrant for the kind of life they encounter in America. Furthermore, for many established middle-class Americans, the colored refugees constitute a threat to their security and status quo. This further hinders the re-socialization process for the refugee and reinforces his sense of alienation, uprootedness and human worthlessness. The churches, maintains Shriver, can play a critical role in mediating the assimilation of the refugee and in narrowing the gap of mistrust between established American peoples and refugees.

The churches, he contends, must become catalysts in the liberating and reconciling process in American society. They should be well enough organized today to dare to move outside of their traditional ecclesiological ministry and work toward the resolution of socio-political problems in society. "Involvement in social problems," he asserts, "not retreat from evil can keep the church relevant and honest in face of societal injustices."²⁸ In this kind of involvement the church needs the world just as the world needs the church, both for the sake of their mutual integrity. The world will once again be challenged and renewed by the word of God uttered by the church and the world in return will be a force in shaping the word and action of the church, thereby keeping its witness relevant.

Bonhoeffer's interest in community did figure in the rebirth

of the German and European churches, in the form of various neo-monastic efforts such as the Iona community in Scotland and the Ecumenical Sisters of Mary in Frankfurt Germany, as well as the emergence of Evangelical Lay Academies.

The neo-monastic communities were, in differing degrees, influenced by the model of community life provided by Finkenwalde, as well as by Bonhoeffer's thought on community living expressed in his books, primarily Life Together. Each community has evolved an ethos and Gestalt of its own. However, a common motif integral to all of them is the understanding that the purpose of community life is not personal sanctification by withdrawal from the world but spiritual preparation through community living for working effectively within the world.

Bonhoeffer's thought, especially that expressed in Ethics and Letters and Papers from Prison, is also credited for its influence in the birth of the Evangelical Lay Academies.

The Evangelical Academies emerged from the intellectual ferment which followed World War II. They grew out of the question: How can the individual Christian and Church on the whole make a pertinent contribution to the spiritual and moral renewal of the nation?²⁹ The first conference met at Bad Boll in 1945 where churchmen and professionals met to examine the causes of the moral collapse of the recent past and to consider what they could do together to renew social and political life. Other conferences soon followed, and today the Evangelical Academy Movement finds its expression in huge rallies, such as the Kirchentag, in Germany and in the growing number of lay training centers. The Academies work

from the conviction that the problems encountered in modern society can be approached, clarified and solved through open dialogue between different political, professional, social and religious groups. The Academies are viewed as places of encounter between the church and the world, and as providing a bridge to overcome the contradictions existing in political, economic and social life, such as the tension resulting between management and employees, government and opposition, East and West, industrialized countries and developing nations, man and technological society.

The purpose of the Academies is not to convert the world but rather to help it accept responsibility for itself and to share in that responsibility. In this manner, they intend to let the world know that in the very fallibility or perfection of its humanness it is loved by God and reconciled to him. The Academies toward this end provide a Christian context for confrontation and dialogue adding a Christian insight to issues. Dr. Lee Gable, who did a doctoral thesis on the Academies, states that "they served the purpose of confronting modern man in his everyday questions in the life of the gospel, to bring these questions closer to clarification and so to witness to the unity of life in the freedom of the gospel."³⁰

The academies organize rallies, conferences, retreats and other forms of interaction. Through these encounters different groups that live and work side by side and normally have little cause or interest in meeting, have an opportunity to meet and dialogue with each other as they approach issues relevant to their lives. Dr. Franklin Littell, in his book The German Phoenix, claims

that the Academies have played a significant role in the rehabilitation of professional peoples and in mediating better understanding between different groups of people.³¹

There are presently over sixty institutions functioning on a year-round basis in twelve different European countries, and the movement has spread internationally with academies organized along similar patterns in countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, India, and the United States.

Precisely how influential Bonhoeffer's thought was in the formation of these communities is hard to assess. Loren Halverson acknowledges the difficulty in finding a direct tie between the Evangelical Lay Academies and Bonhoeffer's thought. In a letter to the writer of this thesis he states that, "the people who started the German Academy...were all profoundly influenced by Bonhoeffer, and some of their friends were closely associated with him...The influence is there, but not in a way that can easily be documented."³² Eberhard Bethge points out that the founding fathers of the Evangelical Academy Movement were for the most part acquainted with Bonhoeffer personally and familiar with some of his later thoughts on the necessity of reshaping the church vis à vis the world. I quote rather extensively from his letter responding to my question about Bonhoeffer's influence:

...but Ethics appeared already in 1948 and I remember when the Berlin Evangelical Academy (Dr. Mueller) began its planning. He and his friend had already read (Ethics) and it was known by some ecumenical publications, who were thinking in the lines of the relations 'gospel-world', which was to be found in Ethics. In addition, Bonhoeffer knew Dr. Von Thadden quite well. Another important figure was Oskar Hammelsbeck...(who was a pastor of the Confessing Church), and who had had

important conversations with Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the early '40's about the necessity of opening the Confessions to investigate and to address problems of modern people in a different fashion...Of course most of the fathers of the movement were acquainted very well with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and so they were at once taken in (when his new turn was available for reading)...and found themselves much propelled, in their own first attempts, by the way Bonhoeffer as one of the important helpers and initiators of the movement.³³

Dr. Eberhard Mueller, who organized the first Academy at Bad Boll, and played a leading role in the life of the movement for twenty-five years until his retirement, responds in a letter to the writer as well, "The ideal 'Church in the World' was not Bonhoeffer's alone. In retrospect, one can say that Bonhoeffer's thought was actualized through the movement. Naturally, later on when the Evangelical Academy Movement was more or less established, and we had more time to reflect on its theoretical origins, we found that Bonhoeffer's thought was in many respects evident and influential."³⁴

It appears that the ideas for the Evangelical Academy Movement lay in the air, so to speak, and were articulated by others as well as Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer most certainly did not supply all the theology for the new lay movement. Other theologians had also a direct and indirect influence. Bonhoeffer's input may be described as one of theological kinship rather than one of direct cause and effect. But as Wentz adds in his article "Lay Renaissance": "The radically modern, radically serving spirit of the movement exemplified is the offshot of Bonhoeffer's temper and articulate witness. The insights that govern the Lay Academies found vivid expression in the thinking and action of Dietrich Bonhoeffer."³⁵

Bonhoeffer's contribution to the church's self-understanding has basically been twofold. First of all, he urged the churches to accept the world rather than separate from it. In accepting the world, the church must recognize that the world as it is developing is the maturation of the historical process. Secondly, he called for the churches to learn to address modern individuals from a profound understanding of their reality, namely in a language the contemporary person could understand. This includes committed responsible action for the sake of human justice. Here, while accepting the world in its very profanity, the church acts to change elements in the world that inhibit the rights and privileges of every human being to be fully realized and also prevents revelation from taking place fully on earth. To what degree Bonhoeffer's total message to the churches has been perceived depends upon who is interpreting him. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer's impact remains one of inspiration and regeneration.

The discussion in this chapter shows that Bonhoeffer's thoughts on the role and identity of the contemporary church has been picked up by certain elements of the churches and by different institutional manifestations of the church. Bonhoeffer addresses both parties in that he directs them to affirm the whole world and redirects the church to a mature, realistic acceptance of this world. He causes the churches thereby to reassess aspects of their institutional life and message that no longer are relevant to the contemporary situation. In this way he encourages churches to discover a new form of ecclesiology whereby their structures and roles are

defined through the societal context in which they serve. He also has been instrumental in letting the churches understand that an integral aspect of their ministry is by political involvement. The result has been a growing number of communities who are committed to an open or subversive resistance to their governments' policies because of the human injustices perpetrated by these governments. At the same time he calls the churches to a new awareness of their role in fostering political and religious ecumenism. Finally, his theology has supplied inspiration in the formation of a new form of Church in Europe, namely the Evangelical Lay Academy, whose intent is to bring the message of liberation and reconciliation to all facets of modern society.

The writer concludes that Bonhoeffer, through his theology and in some instances through his personal example, has a significant bearing on the institutional manifestations of the contemporary church and to theologians and lay individuals within the Christian tradition in their concern for an authentic role and identity for the institutional manifestations of the church in contemporary society.

FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER TWO

1. John Phillips, Christ For Us In the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 265.
2. Ibid, p. 27.
3. Ibid, p. 30.
4. John Godsey, The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, (Philadelphia: The New Westminster Press, 1960), p. 266.
5. Ibid, p. 264.
6. Ibid, p. 280.
7. Ibid, p. 280.
8. Ibid, p. 281.
9. Ibid, p. 13.
10. Ibid, p. 281.
11. Ronald Smith, World Come of Age, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), p. 203.
12. Phillips, Christ For Us In the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 25.
13. Geoffrey Kelly, "Marxist Interpretation of Bonhoeffer," p. 214.
14. Ibid, p. 215.
15. Ibid, p. 215f.
16. Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr, p. 31f - 36.
17. Ibid, p. 40.
18. International Bonhoeffer Society Newsletter, p. 2.
19. Ibid, p. 2.
20. William Kuhns, In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, (Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum Press, 1966), p. 249.
21. Ibid, p. 263.
22. Ibid, p. 262.

23. Ibid, p. 253.
24. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 170
25. William Kuhns, In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 256.
26. International Bonhoeffer Society, Newsletter, p. 3.
27. Ibid, p. 3.
28. Ibid, p. 4.
29. Frederick Wentz, "Lay Renaissance: Europe and America," Christian Century Vol.76, (May 13, 1959), p. 576.
30. Lee Gable, Personal Letter, Sept. 16, 1978.
31. Franklin Littell, The German Phoenix, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 115.
32. Loren Halverson, Personal Letter, July 17, 1978.
33. Eberhard Bethge, Personal Letter to A.Siirala, Dec. 20, 1978.
34. Frederick Wentz, "Lay Renaissance: Europe and America," p. 576.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEMPORARY HERMENEUTICS

John Lennon in the later sixties declared that the Beatles had become more popular than Jesus. Lennon did not mean to be disrespectful to what Jesus represented, but his statement incurred the anger of many, particularly throughout Bible-belt America. Yet, what he said was true, and his statement, although not intended to be, could be construed as an indirect indictment of the churches. Instead of the Beatle-record-burning that was carried on, church people should have listened closer to the meaning in Lennon's message. Rock groups, like the Beatles, have captured the hearts and minds of individuals, particularly the young. Certainly, there are numerous psychological and sociological, as well as musical reasons for this, but surely, one of them is that the language that these singer songwriters use is a direct outgrowth of the experience of contemporary youth. The pain of a broken heart is so much more cuttingly expressed by a heavily rhythmic ditty than Aida's soprano arias, all musical criticism aside. As Marshall McLuhan sought to show us, the medium is the message. And in this case, the medium is the language. Surely, part of Jesus' popularity in Israel was due to the fact that he spoke the language of the common man. His parables express how closely he understood the lives of his hearers. Somehow, miraculously, the churches have retained the essential message of Christ, but have lost the battle in making it a meaningful experience to the common man. The church has not grown with the world. A whole generation of young people have grown up who, by and large, regard the church as an antiquated, moralistic and fastly fading institution.

The language the churches speak is so fundamental to its

message that it raises the question of Christian missions in non-Christian countries as well. Indeed, integral to our religious language are the values and presuppositions of our western, Judeo-Christian tradition, which are not part of the religio-cultural make-up of another tradition. What often happens is that the Christian message is construed as being a form of imperialism, capitalism or American democracy, because it is so out of touch with the fundamental ethos and religio-cultural value and symbolic structure of a particular people. This is a critical point, in particular, where churches are working in third world countries. The language, of course, predicates the theology, but because language expresses the deepest concerns of man verbally, it can also stimulate and color theology's development. I recall being told by a Japanese person how very difficult it is for Japanese people to grasp Christian concepts such as one omnipotent God, or personal sin, because these were not part of the religious experience of the Oriental mind. I believe that the fundamental message of reconciliation and liberation can be articulated in a manner that is compatible with the sociological, religious and cultural ethos of a people, without violating their uniqueness as a nation. After all, John Lennon and the Beatles succeeded drawing an international audience for their message. And, theirs, at that time, was a watered-down, 'kitsch' version of peace and love, although it certainly was a sincere statement. But, the Christian Church should be in the forefront in forging inroads for speaking to modern man in creative new ways that emerge out of man's religio-cultural and socio-political

experience.

Critical theology addresses these problems of religious language, although it does not profess to have the definitive answer. It directs and challenges the churches to reassess their witness, including that of language, and their ability to communicate the message of the gospel to the contemporary individual, whoever s/he may be and wherever s/he may be found.

The world that Bonhoeffer encountered in his later years was a world filled with people not connected with the church. Many of them were agnostic, atheistic or totally a-religious. In the resistance, he met with the stark contradiction of men and women, coming from diverse religious and political persuasions, but holding in common their belief in justice, for which they dared to risk their lives. In his prison letters he referred to this as unconscious Christianity and believed that these individuals were fulfilling God's will. On the other side, he knew that the church pews of the Reich's Churches, including the Confessing Church, were inhabited by individuals who professed to be Christians and, at the same time, had closed their eyes and ears to the pernicious heresies of the church and the pathological schemes of their government, as well as to the sufferings of those who were victims of these laws and sentiments. Prison life reinforced this experience for Bonhoeffer and gave it greater dimension. For once again, he witnessed how totally absent God was in the experience and orientation of his fellow prisoners. Yet, if Christ's life had any meaning, surely, it must also incorporate this growing part of humanity who,

with God, before God, was living without God. He defined the problem, as he attempted to bring structure to the radical new vision he had of a world built on irreligious presuppositions and thoroughly permeated by a secular ethos. "The question to be answered," he wrote, "would surely be: what do church, a community, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life mean in an irreligious world? How do we speak (or perhaps we cannot now even 'speak' as we used to) in a secular fashion about God?"¹ He tendered some intimations of what speaking to secular man entailed: "It will be a new language," he forwarded, "perhaps quite non-religious, but liberating and redeeming as was Jesus' language; it will shock people, and yet overcome them by its power; it will be the language of a new righteousness and truth, proclaiming God's peace with men and the coming of his Kingdom."² Here the Christian has no line of escape available to him from earthly tasks and difficulties but must, like Christ himself, "drink the earthly cup to the dregs."³ The language will in part be born out of the act of sharing in the secular problems of ordinary human life, "not dominating, but helping and serving."⁴ In this way it will begin again to tell man-in-the-world that to live in Christ means to exist for others.

Harvey Cox gives a more definitive answer to the question of how the churches and believers must speak to today's man:

The first move in answering Bonhoeffer's question is to alter the social context in which speaking of God occurs...We have to focus on political theology because in secular society politics replaces meta-physics as the language of theology.⁵

Cox sees Bonhoeffer as one who understood and defined the problem but who never lived to furnish a complete solution. Cox has

taken up Bonhoeffer's questions and shown the churches and believers out of what context the new language must be derived in order to be relevant. He sees the development of a new religious language as imperative for the churches, second only to the Churches' role and responsibility in affirming and cultivating the secularization process. "We must learn," he writes, "as Bonhoeffer said to speak of God in a secular fashion and find a non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts. For it will do no good to cling to our religious and metaphysical version of Christianity in hope that some day it will again be back."⁶

Paul van Buren, Professor in the Department of Religion at Temple University, Philadelphia, has also taken up Bonhoeffer's question of the non religious interpretation of Biblical concepts. He dedicates his book The Secular Meaning of the Gospel to Bonhoeffer, opening with a poem by Auden and, in this way, establishes his debt to Bonhoeffer. Van Buren, however, makes it clear that he does not claim the support of Bonhoeffer in his answer. Bonhoeffer's thought in Letters and Papers from Prison had only stimulated him to ask certain questions.

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."⁷

Van Buren, along with Cox, agrees that the technological, scientific and sociological developments of the past century have given man another empirical way of understanding the world. It is therefore a necessity and a constructive task to re-interpret the Biblical concepts in a way which may be understood by man whose orientation to reality is empirical rather than mystical.⁸ In

developing his thesis, Van Buren makes occasional reference to Bonhoeffer. However, his main interest is in forging a path that bypasses the weaknesses of transcendental and liberal theologians and finds a means of conveying the gospel message in the secular context. He focuses on two factors that play a crucial role in this development. First, he establishes the centrality of Christ in a contemporary way,⁹ and second, he faces the critical issue of language and hermeneutics.¹⁰ At the end of his study he once again pays tribute to Bonhoeffer, acknowledging that his conclusion may differ, but the spirit remains the same.

Thomas Altizer, *Radical Theologian*, insists that the new language of Christianity can only come after the death of the traditional Christian religion. The traditional understanding of God must die, must be eradicated from the consciousness of men before a profoundly contemporary revelation can appear. It is only after we have shaken off the vestiges of the old religious formulations that we can be free and open for new insights.¹¹ Altizer draws predominantly from Eastern Mysticism, Mircea Eliade and the mystical poet William Blake for clues to this new epiphany and sees these as sources of inspiration and spiritual discipline in this time of waiting. He draws from Bonhoeffer on two counts: At first, Altizer stands in agreement with Bonhoeffer's stipulation that until the church learns how to speak in a secular fashion about God, she should retain a qualified silence.¹² In Letters and Papers he writes, "We are not yet out of the melting pot, and any attempt to help the church prematurely to a new expansion of its organization will merely delay its conversion and purification. It is not for us to know

that day (though the day will come) when men will once again be called so to utter that word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it...Till then the Christian cause will be a silent and hidden affair...and wait for God's time."¹³ Altizer in a similar, but more radical tone points out, "Theology must cultivate the silence of death...it must will the death of God, must will the death of Christendom. Everything that theology has thus far become must now be negated...because theology can not be reborn unless it passes through and freely wills its own death and dissolution."¹⁴

Altizer secondly ties in with Bonhoeffer's interest in the east, where Bonhoeffer believed a new understanding of the gospel could be found. In Letters and Papers Bonhoeffer suggest, "How this religionless Christianity looks, what form it takes is something I'm thinking about a great deal...It may be that on us in particular midway between East and West there will fall the heavy responsibility."¹⁵ In a letter he writes more clearly,

There is one great country I should like to visit to see whether it may not be from there that the great solution is to come: India. For otherwise all seems to be over and the great dying of Christianity is to be at hand. It is possible that our age is past and the gospel entrusted to another People, perhaps to be preached with quite other words and deeds.¹⁶

Altizer's sentiments resonate closely for he too believes that "from the east we may once more learn the meaning of the sacred."¹⁷

Although Altizer admittedly does not focus on Bonhoeffer as his primary source, he acknowledges him as a forerunner and a contributing influence for Death of God Theology.

Theologians in their concern for revamping Biblical concepts and language into an expression and conceptual experience that the contemporary individual can understand find in Bonhoeffer a fellow theologian who shared the same concerns. Through his writings they are challenged and inspired to develop their own formulations that may mediate the growing gap between modern man's consciousness and the anachronistic biblical language.

Bonhoeffer's thought on the necessity of finding a contemporary hermeneutic addresses primarily theologians from within the Christian tradition. Firstly, Bonhoeffer recognizes that the secularization of society is permanent; consequently, the churches must find a way to speak of God in the language of this new world if they are to fulfill their sacred function and retain a viable and credible role in this world. Secondly, he proposes that until the church has learned to speak of God to an irreligious world, it should observe a qualified silence rather than fumble into embarrassment. Finally, he suggests that the churches and believer be open to the experiences of other religious traditions and cultures, for this may help in conceiving a new language.

The writer concludes that Bonhoeffer bears a significant witness to the theologians within the Christian tradition in their concern for contemporary hermeneutics, where gospel and biblical ideas are translated into a language modern man can comprehend and utilize.

FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER THREE

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 280.
2. Ibid, p. 300.
3. Ibid, p. 337.
4. Ibid, p. 383.
5. Harvey Cox, The Secular City, p. 255.
6. Ibid, p. 4.
7. Paul Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 2.
8. Ibid, p. 5f.
9. Ibid, p. 48f.
10. Ibid, p. 78f.
11. Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton, Radical Theology and the Death of God, p. 11.
12. Ibid, p. 15.
13. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 300.
14. Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton, Radical Theology and the Death of God, p. 15.
15. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 282.
16. Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Contemporary, (London: Collins, 1970), p.329.
17. Altizer and Hamilton, Radical Theology and the Death of God, p. 16.

CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ECUMENISM

In this study it has been shown that Bonhoeffer's thought and life have been apprehended and interpreted by a diverse representation of individuals, stemming from differing cultural, religious and political persuasions and experiences. This in itself would draw Bonhoeffer's witness into an ecumenical context. But, more impressively, his thought has become a starting point from which many groups of differing socio-political, and religio-cultural backgrounds have begun dialoguing. Consequently, the spirit of ecumenism can be forwarded through an increased sensitivity, understanding, trust and acceptance between differing factions, leading toward, not merely harmonious and mutually respectful co-existence but, equally as important, a co-operative activism between groups sharing common humanitarian goals. An example, perhaps representative of how widely ecumenical Bonhoeffer's influence has become, comes to us from Japan.

Reverend Hisashi Kajiwara of Ichinomiya, Aichi, Japan, in his address to the recent International Bonhoeffer Society Conference in Oxford England,¹ told of how he was assisted in his plan to attend the conference. He had despaired of being able to attend because of lack of funds. When a Buddhist monk friend, who had read the prison letters, and who had come to appreciate the life and thought of Bonhoeffer through conversations with Kajiwara, heard of his situation, he provided the money for the trip. As a result, a Christian pastor from Japan could attend the Bonhoeffer Conference because of the sensitivity and generosity of a Buddhist, whose link of friendship had been forged in part by their common

interest in Bonhoeffer.

For Bonhoeffer, ecumenism was a natural by-product of Christian faith. He participated in the Ecumenical Movement because he saw it as the international expression of the church. Bonhoeffer's ecumenical instincts were not only religious, but also political. When Bonhoeffer joined the Resistance, he did so because he viewed this as the only step available for him as a Christian to act in a responsible manner to the events of his day. It was from that moment that Bonhoeffer confronted in an intense and daily manner individuals who had similar objectives for establishing a society based on justice but who did not profess to be believers. In fact, some were radical Bolsheviks. Bonhoeffer encountered here a political ecumenism in which solidarity and co-operation were achieved by common humanistic objectives.

Bonhoeffer's commitment to the Ecumenical Movement and his involvement in the resistance demonstrate how authentic Christian living is a wholistic affair, where religious and political boundaries must be pushed away so that the gospel could be made real in the liberation and reconciliation of humanity.

Bonhoeffer has been well received by the Catholic Church which he had revered deeply. Mutual respect in itself can be an aid for ecumenical breakthrough. However, William Kuhns in his excellent book In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, points out that Bonhoeffer's accessibility to Catholics lies in basically three areas which he addresses and which profoundly concern Catholics today. These are mentioned in Chapter Two, on the identity and role of the church. That is, he speaks to Catholics in his understanding

of the church, in his interpretation of authority and his anthropology.² Bonhoeffer is significant, maintains Kuhns, in that he addresses areas of concern to Catholics in their efforts in bringing their faith into a more relevant context. It is important to note that Bonhoeffer speaks effectively to the Catholic only because he has been able to transcend the limitations that have traditionally circumscribed Catholic thinking from Protestant thinking. Bonhoeffer has become one of the few Protestant Theologians who bypasses the theological barrier that has traditionally separated these two religious heritages, and can speak to Catholics as a Catholic. This is a significant breakthrough on Bonhoeffer's part, for the gap between the two Christian traditions cannot easily be bridged.

Kuhns defines the problem more clearly:

My own reflection is that a Catholic brings to a Protestant theology a set of presuppositions and attitudes which make his understanding of that theologian fundamentally different from a Protestant. Because a Protestant theologian is working from a tradition and a set of premises foreign to Catholics, he will tend to be a 'threshold theologian'. That is, before he can be understood, a critical threshold must be crossed in which the Catholic can accept or at least recognize the premise from which he is working. What is significant...about Bonhoeffer is that he does not seem to be a threshold theologian. His books speak directly to a Catholic as a Catholic, despite their emergence from the most vital sources in Protestant tradition.³

Kuhns sees that in being able to speak effectively to Catholics as a Protestant Bonhoeffer provides one of the most fertile sources for ecumenical discussion. Furthermore, Kuhns suggests that in this dialogue, Catholics and Protestants can discover a vision and language for a future church which is neither Catholic or Protestant but only Christian.⁴

Hanfried Mueller, speaks as a Christian Marxist. He likes

Bonhoeffer because, he finds that Bonhoeffer's thought can be an excellent vehicle for bourgeois Christian and socialist Christian discussion. Through Bonhoeffer both parties can find a ground of common concern. However, Mueller hopes that from this starting point, Bonhoeffer's theological direction, as he interprets him, will facilitate the bourgeois Christian's conversion to socialist ideals.⁵ Mueller sees socialist society equivalent to Bonhoeffer's world come of age and as the only social context in which a realistic religio-political expression can occur.⁶ He believes Bonhoeffer can serve as a model for the bourgeois Christian of our time, in helping him reject the anachronistic bourgeois structures of the Christian heritage and move towards an expression of Christianity that does not require the formal church or the ancient concept of God.⁷

Another response from the Marxist camp comes from atheistic Marxists. Milan Machovec and Dmitri Ugrinovich find Bonhoeffer's thought, particularly that expressed in Letters and Papers, to be a meeting ground for Christian and atheistic Marxist understanding.⁸ Geoffrey Kelly, Secretary of the Bonhoeffer Society and currently teaching at La Salle College in Philadelphia, gives a brief but comprehensive introduction to the position of these two men in an article entitled The Marxist Interpretation of Bonhoeffer. Machovec is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Prague, and Ugrinovich is Doctor of Philosophical Science and Professor of Dialectical and Historical Materialism at the Society of Arts at the Moscow University. These two men have co-authored a study on

Bonhoeffer's theology.

The aim of their work is to help Christians understand that the humanistic socialist viewpoint of Marxism is not incompatible with Christian belief. Thus, in understanding the commonality of their ideologies, Christians and Marxists can begin a program of co-operation in various fields. Eventually through this co-operation, the authors believe, will come the inevitable conversion to Marxism.⁹ Machovec and Ugrinovich interpret the gospel of Jesus as being actualized through the ideals and working out of Marxism. This realization has not taken place in western bourgeois countries because of organized religion, which has prevented the fulfillment of the historical process of Christianity which would lead naturally to a socialist form.¹⁰ It is therefore necessary to de-religionize Christianity, as Bonhoeffer outlined in Letters and Papers, before new inroads can be laid in the socialization of Christianity.

Machovec and Ugrinovich see an ideational kinship in Bonhoeffer's man for others, who engages in a self-transcending service to one's fellow man, the activist comrade. For it is the liberating service of one's fellow man that is the impelling force behind the communist Movement.¹¹ In this spirit the atheistic Marxist and the Christian can join forces against the dehumanizing forces, such as plutocracy, war, fascism, economic domination, racial oppression and so on, those forces which prevent human beings from actualizing their full potential and which impede the process of Revelation to fulfill itself on earth.

These two scholars, however, intend more than mere co-operation and understanding between atheistic Marxists and Christians.

That is only one advantage of political ecumenism. The other is that, through this co-operation, bourgeois Christians will come to a kind of conversion to socialist beliefs.¹² In any case, they see in Bonhoeffer immense promise for Christian-Marxist dialogue.

Perhaps the best example of Bonhoeffer's thought resulting in the promotion of ecumenism is the recently organized Bonhoeffer Society. The original purpose of the Society was to establish archives and to facilitate research and scholarly work on Bonhoeffer. However, through its annual conferences, retreats and workshops, it has become a forum for individuals from diverse backgrounds of different religious and political casts to present to an international body the current impact of Bonhoeffer's thought on their lives and societies. In 1976 the society was called upon to participate at a special symposium by the World Council of Churches in Geneva. It also sponsors sessions at the annual convention of the American Academy of Religion, of which it has become an affiliated member. In this manner, the society has served predominantly a religious function; but concomitantly, because of the very nature of the pervasiveness of Bonhoeffer's thought, its impact has served a politically ecumenical role as well.

The Evangelical Academy Movement also is an indirect application of many of Bonhoeffer's ideas to the shape of the contemporary church. As well as the occasional reference to Bonhoeffer's thoughts and his personal witness in its ministries, the academies have become a concrete social context where ecumenism in religious and political understanding is achieved.¹³ Here, through seminars, conferences, retreats and such, individuals and groups from diverse

political, religious and social strata are given a neutral ground to interact and communicate. Groups, that would normally not find reason to dialogue are given space to air differences and discover common interests and objectives. Bonhoeffer alone is not credited for the development of the Evangelical Academy Movement. However, his influence is there, and the multifaceted impact of its outreach is a truly commendable portrayal of what contemporary Christian community life entails, where all factions of society are touched for the sake of a more humane world.

Bonhoeffer's work has been described as being instrumental in promoting a climate for true dialogue between denominational and political groups who were at one time cut off from each other. These groups see Bonhoeffer as a good starting point for breaking the mistrust, misunderstanding and alienation they have toward each other. Many envision the emergence of a new kind of Christian community as a result of this communication, one that is theologically and politically congruent with the fundamental principles of the Christian faith.

The writer proposes that the chapter above demonstrates that Bonhoeffer speaks to theologians and laity in the Christian tradition, to the institutional manifestations of the church and to intellectuals outside of the church in their concern for political and religious ecumenism. Firstly Bonhoeffer's thought can facilitate trust and dialogue between different religious and political groups by addressing common concerns. This consequently may lead to cooperation between different political and religious groups who have

common objectives. In this manner the cause of ecumenism is furthered. Secondly, his radical thoughts in his prison theology have attracted political groups who see Bonhoeffer as a starting point for discussion across religious and political lines. This kind of interaction may break down mistrust and generate co-operative action against socio-political injustices. Thirdly, Organizations such as the International Bonhoeffer Society and the Evangelical Academy Movement have become institutional contexts in which ecumenism is actually taking place.

Bonhoeffer's witness continues to bear significance to the theologians and lay believers within the Christian tradition, to intellectuals outside of the Christian tract and to the institutional manifestation of the church in their concern for religious and political ecumenism, where the cross-examination of ideas, brings about detente through which co-operation between various religious and political groups can work toward the betterment of human life.

FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER FOUR

1. International Bonhoeffer Society, Newsletter, p. 3.
2. William Kuhns, In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 263.
3. Ibid, p. 248
4. Ibid, p. 263.
5. Geffrey Kelly, "Marxist Interpretation of Bonhoeffer", p. 214
6. Ibid, p. 215.
7. Ibid, p. 216.
8. Ibid, p. 207.
9. Ibid, p. 208.
10. Ibid, p. 209f.
11. Ibid, p. 210.
12. Ibid, p. 210.
13. Frederick Wentz, "Lay Renaissance: Europe and America," p. 576.
14. Ibid, p. 576.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHOLISTIC LIVING

Perhaps the most impressive quality about Bonhoeffer has been his personal synthesis of life and thought, which has drawn the respect of even those who may take issue with his theological perspective. The balance of thought and action in the life of a man who lived in a time of cataclysmic political and social change, is a poignant testimony, especially for the aware and critical contemporary struggling for a humanistic posture in a world often overcast with the machiavellian manoeuvres and tyranny of politicians and corporations. This does not imply that there is an absence of wholistic living in our western society. In fact, there has been an increasing shift towards lifestyles that express synthesis of ideology and action among contemporary individuals. However, the overall thrust of these lifestyles is governed by the interests of personal peace and personal prosperity, whereas the situation of the neighbour is incidental and secondary. The testimony of a life where congruency between thought and action existed, and whose underlying concern was the self-conscious question of how to be the man for others in practical, everyday terms, is all the more impressive and challenging, in contrast to the prevailing quest for narcissistic self-fulfillment evident in most strata of western society today.

This dynamic interplay between Bonhoeffer's life and theology has inspired an almost unanimous agreement among writers (no matter how diverse their theological interpretations of Bonhoeffer are) that this synthesis is worthy of praise, respect and emulation. For the syncretization evident in Bonhoeffer's life, based on the principles of human rights and justice, provide the contemporary observer with an example of the kind of integrity required to tackle

current social and political issues.

Martin E. Marty, editor of Christian Century in an article in the Catholic periodical Commonweal, includes Bonhoeffer with men like Albert Schweitzer, Dr. Martin Luther King, Pope John, Teilhard de Chardin, whose lives also displayed a poignant and creative synthesis of thought and action.¹

Jean Lassere, unconditional pacifist, French Reformed Theologian and former colleague of Bonhoeffer's points out, in an interview that one of Bonhoeffer's enduring contributions is that he left us with a legacy interwoven with a balance and consistency between thought and action. Bonhoeffer is one of the few men, Lassere contends, who were aware of and attempted to eliminate the hiatus between the ideas a person proclaims and what he/she practises. The life of Bonhoeffer, maintains Lassere, demonstrates a good equilibrium between faith and action.²

American Methodist academician John Godsey's estimation of Bonhoeffer's most outstanding contribution is this congruency between his life and thought. "Perhaps the most impressive thing about Dietrich Bonhoeffer," he writes, "is the way in which his own life provides a commentary on his theology."³

The synthesis of life and thought that so profoundly impressed Dietrich in his early experiences abroad, for instance in the Islamic experience, found realization in his own life. The integrity evident in his life has stimulated many individuals, taking only a cursory glance, to look somewhat more seriously at the thought, as well as the life of this man. French Reformed theologian André Dumas points out,

Bonhoeffer's ideas do not deserve to be accepted uncritically because he died for them. But when there is such a consistency between what a man believes and how he lives and why he died, then we are forced to take a second look at the unity of thought life and death.⁴

Vissor T'Hooft, Secretary of the World Alliance in Geneva during Bonhoeffer's time, observes that the integrity in Bonhoeffer's life and thought will continue to draw people to his thought. "We shall never be done with Bonhoeffer," he predicts, and goes on to explain, "All over the world, people who are trying to find meaning and joy in life despite the disorder of the world listen to what he says because he was granted the great opportunity of confirming his message through his life and death."⁵

This synthesis of thought and action is significant as well in that it provides us with an example of what is meant by authentic Christian living in an irreligious world. Lutheran Theologian and Professor of Moral Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., Robert Markies writes that Bonhoeffer comes very close in his own life to the wholeness he set out for us to strive after.⁶

A somewhat different application of Bonhoeffer's example of living in an irreligious world comes from Polish Catholic author Anna Morawksa, who sees Bonhoeffer in the outworking of his life as closer to the experience of believers in socialist countries, where the society is truly irreligious and the social structures and the whole social evolution have been based on non-religious premises. Bonhoeffer provides for the Polish believers an unusual precedent of Christian living in an irreligious world.⁷

It is the integrity embodied in Bonhoeffer's life that has

attracted many Catholics, as well. For one thing, although he was engaged to Maria von Wedemeyer in 1939, he is one of the few Protestant theologians that remained celibate, which may have given his words and actions more authority to Catholics. Catholics have had a long tradition of honoring men and women who have exemplified sanctified living, most of whom were celibate. Celibate commitment to Christ within the Church, as priest, monk or nun, has been regarded as the highest form of sacrifice and an honor. To see the same spirit in a Protestant theologian evokes the sympathy of the Catholic heart. William Kuhns, a Marionist writes, in an article in Christian Century, that the real inspiration of Bonhoeffer lies not only in his thought but also in the tensions and heroism of his life. He elucidates further:

Catholics who attempt to emulate 20th century saints generally include Bonhoeffer, not simply because his life ended in martyrdom, but because the heritage he left behind is without question that of a Christian man and thinker, whose thoughts were mirrored in his life...Perhaps this integrity has beyond all else served to attract Catholics to his writing.⁸

It is, however, his thought as well as his life that stimulates Catholics to find a more contemporary definition of what is meant by wholistic, sanctified living. Bonhoeffer's anthropology with its strong Christ-centered foundation remains at the core of his thought and is an important reason for Catholic interest in him. The tradition of saints so deeply imbued in Catholic culture makes Catholics sense the need to follow a human pattern of holiness. The older patterns, for the most part built upon monasticism, encourage retreat from the world rather than participation. Bonhoeffer, by introducing concepts such as 'holy worldliness'

offers a contemporary version for Christian living.⁹

Finally, the example of wholistic living offered to us by Bonhoeffer has given us another perspective from which to approach the lives of other theologians as well as our own. Needless to say, there exists in every human life tensions of opposing values and priorities, contradictions and ambiguities. Yet, Bonhoeffer's own struggle and the legacy he left us impels us to become more conscious of achieving a similar consistency in our own lives. John Phillips, an Episcopalian theologian, says, that the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer confronts the observer with an "open and rich and at times unnerving man, who somehow shames us and comforts us. Bonhoeffer's theology, like the man himself has this disturbing quality about it and it is good to be disturbed in this way."¹⁰

A letter to the editor in Response Magazine, resonated closely with Phillips' view. The writer states that "Bonhoeffer may contradict himself...but when looking at his life, I don't doubt for a moment that he did not hear the word. And looking from where I labor, I am convinced that we need many more people to leave us with such a legacy."¹¹

It is Bonhoeffer's death, the manner in which he faced death and the reasons for which he died, that is a culmination of an exemplary Christian life in which faith and action were syncretized. Jaraslov Pelikan in Saturday Review notes that Bonhoeffer addressed the world also through his death, for, "Bonhoeffer's death has given special power and poignancy to many of his arguments."¹² The atheistic Marxists, Machovec and Ugrinovich claim that it is in his very resistance to fascism and his death resulting from this resis-

tance that Bonhoeffer is regarded as a hero in Communist countries.¹³

It is true that through the lens of martyrdom Bonhoeffer's personal integrity and courage have been more purely and more distinctly drawn than they would have had he lived. Yet his martyrdom has served in the redefinition of what is understood as modern martyrdom. Franklin Sherman entitled an article on Bonhoeffer as Death of a Modern Martyr. In it, he states that Bonhoeffer's significance lies in that he "embodied both lines of resistance political and religious,"¹⁴ in his martyrdom.

A modern martyr is distinguished from the classical traditional concept in that his martyrdom does not result from isolated religious issues but rather results from religious convictions taken to the lowest common denominator of everyday practical living. That means expressing one's faith in socio-political terms in the form of committed action.

Harvey Cox, in The Secular City, writes that 'today politics replaces metaphysics as the language of theology.'¹⁵ He goes on to explain that political theology must meet people at the point where they feel addressed. This requires that we, as believers, place ourselves at those points and by addressing ourselves to them, permit the reconciling, healing activity of God to occur. It means in the words of Gustavo Gutierrez that we "place ourselves in the path and make ourselves the neighbour,"¹⁶ in order to help alleviate the sufferings of Christ on earth. Contemporary martyrdom results from a socio-political solidarity with the poor, oppressed, exploited, discriminated peoples in our society, those living on the fringe of our society. It is in his committed stand against Nazism, his

expressed solidarity with the persecuted Jewish People, his loyalty to the harassed Confessing Church and his involvement with the resistance stemming out of theological convictions, that Bonhoeffer is included in the category of modern martyrdom. Eberhard Bethge adds Bonhoeffer's name to the likes of Simone Weil, Henri Perrin and Count von Moltke.¹⁷ To this list can be added the names of Dag Hamarskjod, Father Miguel Hidalgo, the three Catholic sisters Ford, Clarke, Kazel, and lay worker, Donovan savagely murdered in El Salvadore recently. For, their martyrdom also resulted out of a committed and creative declaration of faith within a socio-political context. Bethge explains,

Thus a new type of martyr has emerged. No longer is he the holy heroic martyr, but one who is a dishonored witness on behalf of humanity. He does not distance himself from the world as an example of purity, but stays and shares with those who are involved in the hopes and wrongs of this world.¹⁸

The modern martyr approaches and places himself in the path of his neighbour to the point of death. Contemporary Christian living is no longer a matter of private commitment unrelated to the exigencies of our society, but it is rather Christ-like action in the world on behalf of, in solidarity with our suffering sisters and brothers, so that men, children and women can have the opportunity to live in their world as humanely as possible.

To the question often raised whether political action is proper for Christians, Bethge remarks:

It is not our right to judge them...they judge us. This means we must not try and change their witness, they are given to us in order to transform us. Their death has become an authentic example and pattern.¹⁹

William Hamilton, Secular Theologian, expresses a similar

understanding of what makes a martyr:

A martyr is not just a religious man who dies for a cause. He is a man. He could be religious or non-religious, who dies for others.²⁰

The death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer has given us an example, if not unprecedented at least an unusual and extraordinary one, of what is required of committed Christian living and dying in today's world. "Throughout the centuries," concludes Bethge, "there have been intense debates whether the messenger or the message is the most important for the Church. Usually it was decided that everything depended on the proclamation. But martyrs have been regarded in a different way, because in them proclamation and prophet were inseparably joined."²¹

There exists in Bonhoeffer's life and theology an interplay so that in some respects his theology is an outgrowth of his life, and conversely, his life reflects his theology. This integrity is undergirded by Bonhoeffer's immense concern for finding and expressing the ultimate in the penultimate. The continuity found in Bonhoeffer's thought, life and death, as well as the pertinent issues they addressed, gives an eloquent legacy of courage, integrity and commitment. Above all it directs us to the shape contemporary Christian living should take in our own lives.

This chapter demonstrated that Bonhoeffer's life in particular, but also his theology, in some instances, spoke to theologians and individuals within the Christian tradition, in their concern for wholistic living, in that firstly, it provides a model to the contemporary believer of what is entailed in authentic Christian

living. Consequently, it provides a criterion for assessing the degree of integrity in one's own life, as well as in the lives of those having the responsibility of teaching Christian realities. The pattern of wholistic living, given by Bonhoeffer, also directs the contemporary believer to the socio-political responsibility that is an integral part of Christian living, where Christian living effects all facets of one's existence, socio-political as well as personal. Moreover, Bonhoeffer's death reinforces the orientation that contemporary Christian living, derives its very authenticity from a just and responsible follow-through of religious beliefs in the socio-political and personal dynamics of one's life. Consequently, Bonhoeffer's death has helped redefine what is meant by contemporary martyrdom, which results out of total committed immersion in the problems and hopes of this world and in the sufferings of the neighbour.

The pattern of wholistic living given by Bonhoeffer also addresses intellectuals outside of the Christian tract in that it verifies to them the theo-ideological sincerity of his faith.

The writer concludes that Dietrich Bonhoeffer has continued to bear a significant witness to theologians and lay believers within the Christian tradition and to intellectuals outside the Christian tract in their concern for wholistic living where there exists integrity and synthesis of life and thought.

FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER FIVE

1. Martin E. Marty, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," Commonweal Vol.93, (Oct. 2, 1970), p. 28.
2. Geoffrey Kelly, "Interview With Jean Lassere," Union Seminary Quarterly Review Vol.27, (Spring, 1972), p. 160.
3. John Godsey, The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 281
4. André Dumas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality, p. 11.
5. Vissor T'Hooft, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1945-1960," Ecumenical Review Vol.17, (July 17, 1975), p. 227.
6. Robert Markies, "A Relevant Pattern of Holiness," Hibbert Journal Vol.55, (July 1957), p. 392.
7. Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr, p. 14.
8. William Kuhns, "A Catholic Looks at Bonhoeffer," Christian Century Vol.84, (June 28, 1967), p. 832.
9. Ibid, p. 832.
10. John Phillips, Christ For Us In The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, p. 30.
11. Editor, Response Magazine Vol.90, (Jan. 10, 1975), p. 50.
12. Jaroslav Pelikan, "He Inspired the Death of God," Saturday Review Vol.50, (Mar. 18, 1967), p. 30.
13. Geoffrey Kelly, "Marxist Interpretations of Bonhoeffer," p. 210.
14. Franklin Sherman, "Death of a Modern Martyr," Expository Times, (Feb.1977), p. 147.
15. Harvey Cox, The Secular City, p. 225.
16. Gustavo Gutierrez, The Theology of Liberation, p. 198.
17. Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr, p. 159.
18. Ibid, p. 164.
19. Ibid, p. 166.

20. William Hamilton, "Bonhoeffer: Christology and Ethics Unified," Christianity and Crisis Vol.24, (Oct. 19, 1964), p. 198.
21. Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr, p. 165.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In the four decades after his death, Bonhoeffer's life and thought have continued to speak to individuals throughout the world. His influence has been largely with those within the Christian communities. However, there are also significant responses to his works from those not professing to be believers and not connected with any church community. The contingency of theo-ideological positions reinforced or inspired by Bonhoeffer's theology draws attention to the fact that his thought continues to address the contemporary individual in whatever situation he may be encountered.

Perhaps the overriding characteristic of Bonhoeffer's thought has been that it has addressed relevant questions of Christian and contemporary living in a modern world. The underlying theological impulse in Bonhoeffer was to make Christ real for those with whom he came into contact, within the context of their situation. He committed himself to do this, not only theologically, but practically as well. This motif is also prevalent in the various theo-ideological positions that have drawn on Bonhoeffer's thought and witness. By directing observers to an acceptance of this world and challenging them to work for solutions within its realities, Bonhoeffer has drawn a diverse following from across the theological spectrum, as well as from observers representing other disciplines, philosophical or ideological camps.

In closing I would like to summarize how Bonhoeffer addresses theologians and lay believers, the institutional manifestations of the church and intellectuals outside of the Christian tract.

In Chapter One, on Critical Theology, we find that

Bonhoeffer challenges his audience to discover a critical and more relevant interpretation of what Christian living means for the contemporary believer. Protestant theologians, in particular, such as André Dumas and Heinrich Ott, find that Bonhoeffer makes a valuable contribution to Protestant theology in dislocating the Ultimate from a remote place in 'heaven' into the midst of our penultimate reality. If God's presence is part of, and at the same time, experienced through the very fibre of this reality, our human lives are given greater meaning and purpose. Bonhoeffer, in pointing to the hidden Christ-in-the-other, liberates the believer to a more concrete witness. In this manner, Bonhoeffer has continued the movement Luther began against religiousity and toward the world. In doing this, Bonhoeffer has helped liberate man from a sterile religion to a Christian life style of responsible and participatory living. His thought also acts as a catalyst in loosening the entrenched polarity in Protestant theology between positivism and liberalism.

Scholars, aware that the secularization process of the twentieth century demands a new approach and definition of religion, have located in Bonhoeffer a similar concern, particularly in his later thought. Closely related to these secularists are the theological formulations of the Christian atheists, who have agreed with Bonhoeffer's call to the believer to let the 'deus ex machina' die and rediscover God by living fully in this world. Both secularists and radical theologians resonate with Bonhoeffer in his challenge to the contemporary believer to bear witness to the neighbour through participatory living, that is taking a responsible and practical part in the exigencies of one's time. Not associated

with the theological posture of the secularist or radical theologians, but closely related in their understanding of Bonhoeffer's significance, is the position of sociologist Peter Berger. He also sees Bonhoeffer as a liberating thrust in moving Christian witness from the church to the world, and in his equally important insistence on taking a responsible part in the socio-political events of the day.

What this means, as Harvey Cox succinctly points out, is that the new language of theology is politics. Christians must no longer just accept secular society as the maturation of man in the historical process, but must equally begin to take a responsible interest in the socio-political situations in which they live, striving to further the cause of justice. This thrust makes Bonhoeffer one noted pioneer by his contributions to the movements of liberation in third world countries, as Rainer Maier and Mark Chapman point out in their works.

Bonhoeffer's thoughts on the Christian's political responsibility also stimulate those in industrialized, capitalistic countries, who like Daniel Berrigan or Robert McAfee Brown have learned to question the unethical and inhumane practices of their governments. They also find in his thought and life an incentive to act towards rectifying existing injustices. For those living in countries, such as South Africa, where the Church indirectly or directly endorses the unchristian practices of their government, Bonhoeffer's own example and his words provide a profoundly poignant inspiration to South African believers who can identify closely with

his situation.

When Bonhoeffer speaks of the need to develop a religion-less Christianity that is in tune with the ethos and structure of secular society, he receives a respectful audience in socialist countries. Marxist Christians see Bonhoeffer's world-come-of-age as epitomized in the socialist society, where the believers have abandoned the anachronistic trappings of bourgeois society in order to live in an irreligious socialist society. They see Bonhoeffer's theological development as moving from bourgeois to socialist consciousness and state that Bonhoeffer's thought, because of his own development, can help liberate bourgeois believers to the acceptance of the emancipated socio-political expression of socialist society. A political believers in socialist society also see Bonhoeffer's idea of the irreligious society closely resembling their own, where the church no longer has a privileged status and Christians must find a new way to express their faith. They also draw from Bonhoeffer's thought, guidelines on how to live in an irreligious world.

In Chapter One, on Critical Theology, we find that Bonhoeffer speaks to theologians and lay believers within Christian communities:

- i. in their concern for developing a theology that directs them to the ontological presence of Christ.
- ii. in their interest in finding a secular way to speak of God to contemporary man.
- iii. in their need to reformulate the Christian faith in word and action so that responsible socio-political action is included.
- iv. in socialist countries, who see his theology of modern

man living in an irreligious society, as speaking to their conditions.

In this chapter, Bonhoeffer also speaks to intellectuals outside of the Christian tract:

- i. in that his thoughts tie in to their interest in finding an interpretation and outworking of the Christian faith compatible with contemporary society.
- ii. in that his works have been received and interpreted by non-believers in socialist countries who see his theological orientation as ideologically closer to theirs.

The writer concludes that Bonhoeffer bears a significant witness to theologians and lay believers within Christian communities and to intellectuals outside the Christian tract in their concern for a critical theology, in which theology assumes an ethical idiom in speaking to the social and political, as well as personal situations.

The connecting element, in all of the interpretations of Bonhoeffer's theology in Chapter Two on The Identity and Role of the Church, is his Christology. For Bonhoeffer, the tangible evidence of Christ's presence on earth was the church, and we find a profound interrelationship in his theology between his Christology and ecclesiology. This interrelationship is one that develops from Christ manifesting himself only within the parameters of the institutional church to the discovery of Christ's presence within all aspects of this world. This new vision of the Ultimate as being in the very midst of the penultimate demands a redefinition of the church's identity, role and witness. Episcopalian theologian John Phillips maintains that Bonhoeffer never resolved the tension between the ecclesio-centered Christology and the world-embracing

Christology; but finds nevertheless that by not resolving the conflict Bonhoeffer addresses the question of the relevancy and credibility of the church's role and witness. Methodist theologian John Godsey differs from Phillips in that he finds Bonhoeffer's Christology as providing a thread of continuity and unity to the dramatic changes in his theology. He draws a similar conclusion to Phillips, however, in finding that Bonhoeffer causes the contemporary church to reassess her own relationship vis à vis the world. Furthermore, Godsey contends that Bonhoeffer, by asserting that Christ is to be found in the neighbour, points the Christian churches to responsible involvement in the events of their communities as a new but necessary road for Christian action.

The churches, urges Bonhoeffer, must be ready to forsake old traditions, anachronistic institutional structures and other paraphernalia that may interfere with an authentic and credible witness. Marxist Christian, Hanfried Mueller sees this call of Bonhoeffer's for a radical rethinking of the church's role in an irreligious world, actualized in socialist society. Bonhoeffer is significant for him in that he, by his own example, and though his theology provides a model and precedent for the evolution towards an irreligious Christianity in a society dominated by a secular ethos and structure. Mueller contends that Bonhoeffer speaks pertinently to Christian communities in socialist society, who have begun to develop a new form of life and witness congruent with the dynamics of their socio-political setting.

One step further on the road toward political activism is the effect of Bonhoeffer's thought upon certain factions within the

South African churches, who are given courage and inspiration to act openly or surreptitiously, corporately or individually, against the inhumane and unchristian practices of their government.

President of Union Theological Seminary, Donald Shriver draws on Bonhoeffer and calls the American churches to radical action for social justice, particularly regarding the refugees and emigrés from third world countries who often constitute an apparent threat to white middle class stability.

Shriver's call resonates closely to the philosophical and practical thrust of the Evangelical Academy Movement which originated in Germany, and is in effect, an active model of what being a church-in-the-world entails. The purpose of the movement, at its inception, was to organize a new form of the Church which would assume more closely the characteristics of its socio-political habitat, and whose primary concerns were to identify and address the areas of inequity, injustice, alienation and so on in a practical manner and in this way mediate the gospel to those who come in touch with the Church. Within the structure of this movement, Bonhoeffer's thought has also taken root, and it is suggested by some that Bonhoeffer, through his earlier association with some of the originators of the Academy Movement, also contributed indirectly to its spirit.

Bonhoeffer is one of the rare Protestant theologians who can speak to Catholics as a Catholic. His appeal to Catholics is multifaceted, and in essence it has a double value. Firstly, it reinstates what they consider sacred and integral to their faith;

secondly, he challenges them to find a more contemporary formulation of these factors, and in his way preserves, yet makes more relevant, the spirit and structure of the Catholic church.

Chapter Two, on The Identity and Role of the Contemporary Church, shows that Bonhoeffer's thought on the role and identity of the churches has been picked up by certain elements of the institutional manifestations of the church and by some theologians and lay believers within Christian communities in that:

- i. he directs them to affirm the whole world and redirects the churches to a mature and realistic acceptance of the world.
- ii. he causes the churches thereby to reassess aspects of their institutional life and message that are no longer relevant to their contemporary society.
- iii. he encourages churches to rediscover a new form of ecclesiology whereby their structures and roles are defined through the society in which they serve.
- iv. he helps the churches to understand that an integral aspect of their ministry is political involvement.
- v. he challenges churches to a new awareness of their role in fostering political and religious ecumenism.
- vi. he has been an inspiration and direction in the formation of a new form of 'church' in Europe in the form of the Evangelical Academy Movement.

The writer concludes that this chapter demonstrates that Bonhoeffer has continued to bear significant witness to the institutional manifestations of the church and to theologians and lay believers in the Christian communities in their concern for an authentic role and identity for the institutional manifestation of the church in contemporary society.

One vital way which churches must probe and develop in order to establish a meaningful dialogue with modern man is through the

re-evaluation of religious language. Bonhoeffer was well aware that as a result of the technological and sociological changes in society, modern man was experiencing and expressing his/her reality differently. In view of this Bonhoeffer recognized the urgency of communicating the gospel to the hearer in a language and manner in which the message could be understood and grasped. In Chapter Three, on Contemporary Hermeneutics, we find three theologians who in their own concern for a relevant and meaningful interpretation of the gospel, have drawn from Bonhoeffer for inspiration, direction and clues for their own answers.

Harvey Cox contends that the contemporary churches' major concern (second only to the cultivation of the secularization process) must be to find a non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts that can be understood and take root in the hearts and lives of people in secular society. Cox, proposes that theology must abandon its metaphysical terminology and draw its frame of reference from within the socio-political realities of the contemporary world.

Paul Van Buren closely resonates with Cox in his perception that the secularization process is irreversible and must be accepted by Christian communities as a natural development in the history of man. Van Buren points out that since there is a strong emphasis in secular society on empiricism, the contemporary individual tends to have a more rational, rather than mystical, orientation to reality. This must be taken into account in the formulation of a new language. From this point Van Buren departs in developing his own ideas of how to interpret the gospel in modern terms.

Thomas Altizer draws on Bonhoeffer for two rather unexpected and unusual developments. Altizer, as a radical theologian believes that a new language cannot be born until the traditional form of Christian religion has died. Any vestiges of the old Christian concepts, traditions and language will only preclude the inception of a new epiphany. Altizer finds in Bonhoeffer a fellow theologian who demanded that until the churches have learned to speak to the contemporary in a pertinent and meaningful way they should retain a qualified silence. Any half-hearted or equivocal attempt would only serve to undermine her credibility and authority. Secondly, Altizer, attracted to the mysticism of eastern religions, has found that Bonhoeffer also hoped through the eastern experience to find a new approach to Christian truths.

Chapter Three on Contemporary Hermeneutics shows that theologians and lay believers from within the Christian communities have found Bonhoeffer relevant in their concern for a contemporary hermeneutic in that,

- i. he recognized that the secularization of society is irrevocable, so that Christians and the churches must find a way to speak of God in the language of the new world.
- ii. he suggested that rather than to speak about God in a language that the contemporary individual cannot understand, the church and believers should observe a qualified silence.
- iii. he pointed to other culture and religious experiences as helpful sources in reconceiving the Christian message.

The writer concludes that Bonhoeffer continues to bear a significant witness today to theologians and lay believers within the Christian tradition in their concern for a contemporary

hermeneutic, where the gospel and biblical ideas are translated into a language modern man can comprehend and conceptualize.

Finding a way to speak of God to the contemporary in a way s/he can understand would most certainly facilitate the cause of ecumenism, for having a common language would be a required starting point for meaningful communication. This fact notwithstanding, Bonhoeffer's witness has nevertheless been a source of inspiration for a variety of individuals from diverse political and religious backgrounds in their commitment to further the ecumenical cause.

Perhaps the best example of how Bonhoeffer's witness has been directly responsible in fostering ecumenism is the International Bonhoeffer Society. This organization has by its very nature become a forum for individuals from different political and religious backgrounds to express the impact of Bonhoeffer's witness in their experience. An indirect application of Bonhoeffer's ideas on the shape of the contemporary church is the Evangelical Academy Movement. The academies of this movement have forged a new shape of what being a contemporary church means, and have become a concrete context in which political and religious ecumenism is achieved.

Bonhoeffer has been regarded by socialist observers as instrumental in promoting political rapproachment and broadening the parameters of religious ecumenism. Christian Marxist and atheist Marxists agree that Bonhoeffer is important for the cause of ecumenism on two counts. Firstly, he can be the starting point for capitalist Christian and socialist discussion. Through him points of ideational commonality can be discovered, thus narrowing the gap of mistrust and alienation. Consequently a creative

dialogue and co-operation in common concerns furthering human justice and world peace can result. Secondly, they predict that through the dialogue and co-operation, bourgeois Christians will eventually see that socialism is the natural synthesis of the historical process and come to accept the socialist ideology and social order as the irreligious world-come-of-age of which Bonhoeffer foresaw and spoke.

Finally, Bonhoeffer's accessibility to Catholics stems from a number of reasons that make his theology and person sympathetic to the Catholic observor. It is predominantly, however, his concept of community, his theology on the nature of authority and his anthropology that resonate with Catholic thinking. By being one of the few Protestant theologians capable of speaking to Catholics as a Catholic, Bonhoeffer is very instrumental and essential in Protestant Catholic dialogue. Furthermore, by becoming a meeting point for Catholic and Protestant discussion, Bonhoeffer's later thought can escalate participants out of their entrenched Christian traditions to a radically new and liberated Christian identity.

Chapter Four, discussing Political and Religious Ecumenism shows that theologians and lay individuals from within Christian communities, institutional manifestations of the church and intellectuals outside the Christian tract, have discovered in Bonhoeffer a source for ecumenical dialogue and co-operative efforts.

- i. Bonhoeffer's thought can facilitate trust and dialogue between different religious and political groups by addressing common concerns.
- ii. This may lead to co-operation between different religious and political groups who share common

humanistic objectives.

- iii. Ecumenical discussion and co-operation between different religious groups and between political groups may lead to a new vision of Christian living that is an outgrowth of the contributions of all religious and political parties.
- iv. Organizations, such as the Evangelical Academy Movement and the International Bonhoeffer Society, have become institutional contexts in which political and religious ecumenism is taking place. These organizations were inspired by Bonhoeffer's witness.

The writer concludes that Bonhoeffer continues to bear a significant witness to theologians and lay believers within Christian communities, to the institutional manifestation of the church and to intellectuals outside of the Christian tract in their concern for political and religious ecumenism, where a cross-examination of ideas, brings about detente, through which co-operation between various religious, social and political groups can work toward the betterment of human life.

The quality that lends credence to the discussion in the four preceding chapters of this thesis, is the synthesis of thought and action evident in Bonhoeffer's life. Bonhoeffer is significant not only in that his thought gave inspiration to the various theological developments and discussions relating to the concerns of critical theology, the question of the church's role and identity in modern society, the problem of hermeneutics and the efforts toward political and religious ecumenism; but also, in that he proceeded through his life to meet and answer these concerns in both private and professional capacities. Bonhoeffer's life was not without its shortcomings, but nevertheless, the overriding effect has been that of a man, profoundly committed to actualizing

his faith through the dynamics of his life, and in a painstakingly honest manner seeking to establish an integrity of theology and life. The general consensus among Bonhoeffer's observers is that this synthesis of life and faith is perhaps the most prominent characteristic of Bonhoeffer's witness. Theologians like Martin Marty and Jean Lassere point out that in achieving an integration of life and faith, Bonhoeffer provides a model of what contemporary Christian living should entail. This wholistic interplay between life and faith takes on a new turn in the eyes of believers in socialist countries who are encouraged by Bonhoeffer's example to work out an expression of Christian living that is congruent with their milieu.

Furthermore this wholistic balance impresses the casual observer and draws them to take a closer look at what Bonhoeffer said. Vissor T'Hooft and André Dumas see this as a significant by-product of Bonhoeffer's life. The exemplary witness given by Bonhoeffer's life does indeed draw Catholic observers who by the very nature of their faith are sensitive to and honor examples of sanctified living. Bonhoeffer, by attracting the Catholic believer, provides a more contemporary definition of sanctified Christian living; one that could be accessible and realized by all believers, not only a select few.

By providing the contemporary believer with an example of wholistic living, Bonhoeffer has at the same time established a standard by which each individual can measure the consistency between theory and action in his own life in both public and private

sectors.

Bonhoeffer's step into political activity as a natural response to his faith challenges believers to assume a similar spirit of understanding the socio-political sphere as the place in which our Christian faith is actualized. Bonhoeffer through the integration of life and faith does away with any compartmentalization of the sacred and the secular, and guides the contemporary believer to see his socio-political responsibility as a natural and integral part of Christian living.

Bonhoeffer's death demonstrates to what extent socio-political and Christian living are tied together, and it verifies the sincerity of his theological commitment. Moreover as William Hamilton, Franklin Sherman and Eberhard Bethge point out, Bonhoeffer's witness through his death, as well as by his life, has helped redefine the concept of a modern martyr, as one who is committed in resisting and rectifying injustices for the sake of human dignity and rights, and creating a just and peaceful society. Bonhoeffer's death, as much as his life has given a new cast to the socio-political parameters of Christian living and dying.

In Chapter Five, on Wholistic Living Bonhoeffer speaks to theologians and individual believers within the Christian tradition in their concern for wholistic living in that he

- i. provides a model to the contemporary believer of what is entailed in contemporary Christian living.
- ii. establishes a criterion for assessing the degree of integrity in our own lives as well as in the lives of those bearing the responsibility of teaching Christian realities.
- iii. directs the contemporary believer to the socio-

political responsibility that is an integral part of Christian living.

- iv. reinforces by his death the orientation that contemporary Christian living derives its authenticity from a just and responsible follow-through religious beliefs in the social and political as well as personal realities of one's life.

Bonhoeffer's death has helped redefine what is meant by contemporary martyrdom, which results out of committed immersion in the problems and hopes of this world.

The pattern of wholistic living given by Bonhoeffer also addresses intellectuals outside the Christian tract in that it verifies to them the theo-ideological sincerity of his convictions, and makes him a credible Christian.

The writer concludes that this chapter demonstrates that Bonhoeffer continues to have a significant witness to theologians and lay believers within the Christian communities and to intellectuals outside of the Christian tract in their concern for wholistic living where there exists integrity and synthesis of life and thought.

Therefore the writer concludes that the purpose of the thesis has been discussed and demonstrated, in that the writer has shown with the data available that Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thought and life continue to speak today and bear a significant witness to theologians and lay believers within the Christian communities, to the institutional manifestations of the Christian Church and to intellectuals outside of the Christian tract in their concern for a critical theology, the identity and role of the institutional

manifestations of the church in contemporary society, contemporary hermeneutics, political and religious ecumenism and wholistic living.

POSTSCRIPT

While this material was being written, John Lennon was tragically murdered in New York. Although John Lennon was not a Christian, he was profoundly committed to humanitarian and socialist goals. In the early 1970's, instead of investing in an ecologically harmful commodity, oil,^{1*} Lennon invested in livestock, not for the meat value, but for its other life giving qualities, such as cheese and milk. He was committed in helping to make this world a peaceful and more equitable place. As an artistic superstar and an anti-establishment figure, I believe that the mature Lennon, at 40, would have been influential to many who were attracted to his music, person, or beliefs. The impact of his death reflects how influential a figure he was. I think we, who believe in and are working toward a more humane world have lost a sincere and powerful spokesperson in our cause.

It was not long after this that Marshall McLuhan died. One may not always have agreed with McLuhan; however, he did help open our eyes to the twentieth century. Television, computerization, and all the gadgets technologically available to man are here to stay, and this will indirectly and directly affect the way the individual behaves and thinks and may ultimately shape a new kind of human identity. What is important for the churches is his thesis of "the medium is the message". The message is influenced and shaped by the medium. In speaking to the modern man the message must be adapted to the medium it uses. Television is a 'cool' medium, books are a 'hot' medium. Hot media, according to McLuhan, appeals to one single sense more than others, and is low in parti-

cipation on the part of the individual. Cool media is high in participation on the part of the person. Different kinds of communication go well with different media. A talk show will be more effective on television than a church service, for instance. Churches and believers communicating to the contemporary individuals should be aware of what approach best suits the medium being used so that what is being said comes through credibly. Marshall McLuhan was very instrumental in drawing our attention to the way the 'tools' of our modern age affect the structure of our lives and our communication.

A development in the United States (that also has its currents in Canada as well) is the upsurge of groups of people loosely called the 'moral majority'. The landslide victory of Ronald Reagan demonstrated how politically effective and socially pervasive this group is. The emergence of the 'moral majority' brought to mind Harvey Cox's prediction that politics will be the new language of religion, and the conservative element, always a little slower on the uptake, has now consolidated its position openly. An acquaintance asked how I would differentiate the political activism of this conservative faction from the political activism I propose. I thought it was a good question and deserved to be added in this discussion. The socio-political activism I propose is action that arises out of a compassionate commitment to justice. As Bonhoeffer pointed out, responsible action derives its impetus out of "consideration for the given human and general conditions, and for the relevant question of principle"² rather than the

application of a legalistic, categorical code of ethics that is applied regardless of the context or humane considerations. What I find, in my understanding of the position of the moral majority, is that, in their world view, there is not much room for any just deliberation of contextual ethics. Rather than deciding an issue on the basis of justice and love, the moral majority would apply a set code of ethics that in effect is self-serving not truly just or humane.

What gives rise to this kind of mentality may be the second question one can ask. Basically my instincts are humanistic, and I believe that mankind can, does and will continue to regenerate itself and forge creative new paths through the complexities and at times insurmountable problems. It is not an easy process, but I believe that there is enough good in mankind to generate an anti-thesis to injustice and evil. However, one cannot help but notice the immense pressure on the average individual today. On the economic side of things is inflation, soaring interest rates, growing unemployment and the energy crisis. This affects the individual directly economically and more indirectly, in that it decreases his sense of well-being and security. This is compounded by revelations of political scandal, intrigue and deception. To further the frustration are ethical questions modern science directs to the citizen of this day. Divorce, pre-marital sex, the legalization of marijuana are innocuous compared to some of the more radical possibilities broached upon, such as, homosexual marriages; surrogate motherhood, where a fertile woman bears the child for an infertile

one, test-tube babies; cloning; and abortion. Many individuals cannot live with the insecurity, lack of definite guidelines, and ambiguity these kind of problems present. I believe that it was Tillich who said that a mature person has learned to live with ambiguity. Hemingway said it somewhat differently, but in the same vein, when he defined courage as grace under pressure. There are, of course many sociological and psychological as well as religious reasons for the growth of the moral majority, but I think among them, one of the important reasons is the inability to live with ambiguity. The moral majority cannot find the courage to live with ambiguity and consequently opts for a moral straight jacket. Those of us, who believe in creating a just and humane world have all the more reason in our personal, professional and social lives to demonstrate that courage to live with integrity in the face of ambiguity derives from an understanding of and commitment to justice and love.

FOOTNOTES, POSTSCRIPT

1. The Lennons were committed to promoting social and ecological harmony. Until the time of John Lennon's death, one-tenth of their income went to various charities. The Lennon Peace Foundation was established to further the cause of world peace and co-existence among peoples of this earth. The Lennons participated actively in the anti-war movement in the late sixties and early seventies. They regarded modern warfare as totally dehumanizing in its uprooting effect, and its injury to human lives and nature. John and Yoko were influenced by the Zen concept of harmonious balance between man and nature, and saw modern technology, as beneficial as it is to man, destructive to this balance in the final analysis. The extraction of oil from the earth, does create an imbalance in the strata of earth not to mention the pollution emitted into the air and waters through the refineries, or the destruction of ocean life through an oil spillage. Yoko Ono said that they decided to invest their capital in something that nurtured life and did not detract from the ecological balance of the earth. "There is something sacred about a cow" she said. And one need only to think of the nutrient milk, without which our children would not develop properly to see how appropriately her words apply. They also for the above reasons, bought heritage real estate and parks in order to preserve them from annihilation.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 238.

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