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This manuscript was prepared for the speaker's own use and in oral style; thus, it is not "publication-ready," nor is the documentation necessarily consistent. Furthermore, it relies heavily on quotations from Bonhoeffer himself, many of which are adapted, as is also the case with other citations.

LT = Life Together. *Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers are from this book: sometimes from the Works edition, sometimes from the Harper edition, and sometimes a combination of the two (if there is no indication of which edition, see previous citation).*

CD = The Cost of Discipleship.

The document contains (1) the conference lecture itself, (2) appendixes, and (3) the conference handout.

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"GOD SETS THE SOLITARY IN FAMILIES"

Authentic Life Together in the 21st Century as the Concrete Experience of an Eternal Gift

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In this great city of Philadelphia, with the vital role it played in the forming of our nation, I am reminded that we are a society that greatly values – some might say significantly overemphasizes and even obsesses about – individual freedom. And the liberty of each person should certainly be protected and promoted – I don't think any of us have too much of an argument with the Bill of Rights, for example. But this individualism has also seeped from society into the church, and this is poisonous. In *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, James K.A. Smith writes,

Within the matrix of [today's] Christianity, the base 'ingredient' is the individual; the church then, is simply a collection of individuals. Conceiving of Christian faith as a private affair between the individual and God—a matter of my asking Jesus to 'come into my heart' - modern evangelicalism finds it hard to articulate just how or why the church has any role to play other than providing a place to [get together] with other individuals who have a private relationship with God. [Contemporary] Christianity tends to think of the church either as a place where individuals come to find answers to their questions or as one more stop where individuals can try to satisfy their consumerist desires. As such, Christianity becomes [solely] intellectualized rather than incarnate; commodified rather than the site of genuine community.¹

¹ Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 29. Quoted in Dale Meyer, "Why Go to Church?," *Concordia Journal*, Spring 2010, 95-96.

And, by the way, as always, the law here speaks to **you**, not just to those individualistic people “out there.” You, too, are steeped, are well-marinated in our culture’s pervasive individualistic juices. You, too, have the heart that is curved inward on self. You, too, live, breathe, and have your being in the society of iPhones, iPods, iPads, iMacs and in which even Wii is spelled with two i’s.² [pause]

But, for *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, **personal freedom** was always bound up in loving action within and to **the community**. Liberty was outwardly directed, corporately understood, communally lived. Said he, “Freedom *from* something experiences its [fulfillment] only in freedom *for* something. Freedom for freedom’s sake, however, leads to anarchy. Biblically, freedom means: freedom for service to God and the neighbor, freedom for obedience to the commands of God.... Freedom is not primarily an individual right but a responsibility, freedom is not primarily oriented to the individual but to the neighbor....”³

Bonhoeffer, even though admitting the paradox of the personal and the communal, goes on to state that “If you neglect the community of other Christians, you reject the call of Jesus Christ” (Works ed., 83). Indeed, the title of the book in German is *Gemeinsames Leben*, “Joint” or “Common Life” or... “Life Together.” The root of the word is such that you could also translate it as: Life in the Parish, in the congregation, Life in the Christian Church. [pause] For “we are not dealing with a concern of some **private circles**,” says Bonhoeffer in the preface omitted in most editions, “but with a mission entrusted to the **church**” (Works ed., 25) [long pause]

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁴ Arguably, these words from *The Cost of Discipleship* are Bonhoeffer’s most famous. And this call to discipleship naturally meant community: the call being, for Bonhoeffer, incorporation, that is, being membered to the Body of Christ through baptism. And so, the words find their context within his theology of the cross as a whole, and specifically within his discussion of grace and community.

The cross is laid on every Christian. It begins with the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death – we give over our lives to death. Since this happens at the beginning of the Christian life, the cross can never be merely a tragic ending to an otherwise happy religious life. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow Him, or it may be a death like Luther’s, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time –

² Adapted from Erik Herrmann: Concordia Seminary Convocation Series, 30 September 2009, on *Life Together*; available at iTunes. On utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism, see Robert Benne, *Ordinary Saints* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

³ As quoted in Charles Ford, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Resistance, and the Two Kingdoms,” *Lutheran Forum*, Reformation 1993, 32. Also available at: www.germanresistance.com/documents/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer_the_resistance_and_the_two_kingdoms.pdf. Primary source: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “*Gedanken*” in *Gesammelte Schriften I* (Kaiser Verlag: Munich, 1965), 356-360.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 99.

death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at His call. Jesus' summons to the rich young man was calling him to die, because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ. In fact, every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts. But we do not want to die, and therefore Jesus Christ and His call are necessarily our death...*and* our life.

[So,] the call to discipleship, the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, means both death and life. The call of Christ, his baptism, sets the Christian in the middle of the daily arena against sin and the devil. Every day he encounters new temptations, and every day he must suffer anew for Jesus Christ's sake. The wounds and scars he receives in the fray are living tokens of this participation in the cross of his Lord. But there is *another kind* of suffering and shame which the Christian is not spared. While ... only the sufferings of Christ are a means of atonement, yet since he has suffered for and borne the sins of the whole world and shares with his disciples the fruits of his passion, the Christian also has to undergo temptation, **he too has to bear the sins of others**; he too must bear their shame and be driven like a scapegoat from the gates of the city. But he would certainly break down under this burden, but for the support of him who bore the sins of all. The passion of Christ strengthens him to overcome the sins of others by forgiving them.

Of course, this forgiving is difficult, exceedingly difficult, for you, for us sinners. Indeed it would be impossible were it not for the fact that it is truly **Christ's** forgiveness, won and given by him to and through you. Forgiveness overcomes sin because the forgiveness of Christ, and only the forgiveness of Christ in which the baptized participate, **removes** sin. "As Christ bears our burdens, so ought we to bear the burdens of our fellow-men. The law of Christ...is the bearing of the cross. My brother's burden which I must bear is not only his outward lot, his natural characteristics and gifts, but quite literally his sin. And the only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it in the power of the cross of Christ in which I now share. Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian's duty to bear."⁵ [pause]

The call to discipleship is baptism.

So, the baptismal and cruciform presence of the Lord is an ecclesiological/pneumatic one. As such, Bonhoeffer goes on to say that "The Church of Christ is the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit. In this way the life of the Body of Christ becomes our own life. In Christ we no longer live our own lives, but he lives

⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 99, 268, 99-100; Bonhoeffer references Gal. 6:2. Others are borne in and through prayer, as well: "I can no longer condemn or hate other Christians for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble they cause me. In intercessory prayer the face that may have been strange and intolerable to me is transformed into the face of one for whom Christ died, the face of a pardoned sinner. ... Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the community must enter every day" (Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, gen. ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., vol. 5 *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996] 90).

his life in us. The life of the faithful in the Church is indeed the *Life of Christ in them* (Gal. 2:20...). ... Every day Christ is their death and Christ is their life.”⁶

This life of the crucified Christ in the baptized, in “those who have died after the old man through Christ,” means both faith and love: “Love, in the sense of spontaneous, unreflective action, spells the death of the old man. For man recovers his true nature in the righteousness of Christ and in his fellow-man. The love of Christ crucified, who delivers our old man to death, is the love which lives in those who follow him. ‘I live; yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me’ (Gal. 2:20). Henceforth the Christian finds himself only in Christ **and in his brethren.**”⁷ Or, as Luther famously said, a “Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor.”⁸
[pause]

Of course Bonhoeffer’s “classic exploration of faith in community” is *Life Together*, which the district staff has asked you to re-read in preparation for this conference. Indeed, that is the sub-title given to a recent one-volume printing of this little book.⁹ It was written from the context of the illegal seminary at Finkenwalde. The old Prussian seminaries had been closed in 1934 by the Reich Church and now, among other things, candidates had to be of Aryan descent. This underground school was opened in April of 1935 in Zingst and moved to Finkenwalde in June. So this year marks the 75th anniversary of its founding. Anyway, one of the students, Gerhard Lehne, described the community of this seminary-life “as a ‘brotherhood under the Word, irrespective of the person,’ with an ‘open-mindedness and love for everything that still makes this fallen creation loveable – music, literature, sport, and the beauty of the earth – a grand way of life.’”¹⁰ Hating all things of life, the Gestapo closed the school just over two years later, in September of 1937. *Life Together* was written the next year, in 1938, in a single stretch of four weeks, with breaks only for some tennis and a music festival.¹¹

The themes of this beautiful, Epistolary prose span community, the day with others, the day alone, intercession, quiet/solitude, service, private confession, the Lord’s Supper, and more. Within Bonhoeffer’s exposition on community, the themes of bearing, suffering, prayer, and action find a home. And I will be quoting at length throughout this presentation:

“Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Thus the law of Christ is a law of bearing. Bearing means forbearing and sustaining. The brother is a burden to the Christian, precisely because he is a Christian. For the pagan the other person never becomes a burden at all. He simply sidesteps every burden that others may impose on him. The Christian, however, must bear the burden of a brother. He must suffer

⁶ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 272, 321.

⁷ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 178-179.

⁸ Martin Luther (1520), *On Christian Liberty* in *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*, J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957) 371. [LW 31:371].

⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

¹⁰ As quoted in Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley, 1986), 103.

¹¹ Geoffrey B. Kelly in Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 5, 4. Bonhoeffer was quite an athlete, as well as a music aficionado.

and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated. The burden of men was so heavy **for God Himself** that He had to endure the Cross. God verily bore the burden of men in the body of Jesus Christ. But He bore them as a mother carries her child, as a shepherd enfolds the lost lamb that has been found. God took men upon Himself and they weighted him to the ground, but God remained with them and they with God. In bearing with men God maintained community with them. It is the law of Christ that was fulfilled in the Cross. And Christians must share in this law. They must suffer their brethren, but, what is more important, now that the law of Christ has been fulfilled, they *can* bear with their brethren. [T]he freedom of the other person is a burden to the Christian.

And here is where Bonhoeffer affirms the uniqueness and worth of each individual also, as he does not lose the proper balance between community and individual.

[T]he freedom of the other person is a burden to the Christian. The freedom of the other person includes all that we mean by a person's nature, individuality, endowment. It also includes his weaknesses and oddities, which are such a trial to our patience, everything that produces frictions, conflicts, and collisions among us. We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by...*God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions.*

Have you ever had this happen to you, just when you thought you'd finally get some time in the pastor's study to finish that sermon or read that article?! Well, "We may pass them by, preoccupied with our more important tasks...." And we do have many important tasks, don't we?! But many of our tasks are self-important and lead to what Bonhoeffer elsewhere calls "ungodly haste" which threatens our true work as pastors.¹² One of the best pieces of advice I ever received was from a mentor when I was a first-year seminarian. He told me to learn to say "no" and even to not feel obligated to give a reason. Just politely say "no." So, again,

We may pass them these people by, preoccupied with our more important tasks, as the priest passed by the man who had fallen among thieves, perhaps—reading the Bible. But when we do that we pass by the visible sign of the Cross raised athwart our path to show us that, not our way, but God's [will] must be done. It is a strange fact that Christians and even ministers frequently consider their work so important and urgent that they will allow nothing to disturb them. They think they are doing God a service in this, but actually they are disdainful of God's 'crooked yet straight path' (Gottfried Arnold). They do not want a life that is crossed and balked. But it is part of the discipline of humility that we must not spare

¹² Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 31.

our hand where it can perform a service and that we do not assume that our schedule is our own to manage, but allow it to be arranged by God. The first service one owes to others in the community involves listening to them. Those who think their time is too precious to spend listening will never really have time for God and others, but only for themselves and for their own words and plans. There is, of course, a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say. This impatient, inattentive listening really despises the brother and finally is only waiting to get a chance to speak and thus get rid of the other. Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been entrusted to them by the one who is indeed the great listener and in whose work they are to participate. We should listen with the ears of God, so that we can speak the Word of God. But, first there is **silence** in conjunction with the Word of God....

You have the right to remain silent.... Indeed, don't *gossip*. Gossip is especially rampant among us pastors and this is in direct contradiction to a listening posture before the Word. And when it is not a refutation of public falsehood, it is simply sin; it is sin to speak ill of a brother if he is not there to defend himself; to arrogantly elevate oneself at cost to the brother's reputation should be unthinkable. Don't do it. Bonhoeffer continues:

The silence of the Christian is listening silence. Silence before the Word **leads to** proper hearing and thus also to proper speaking of God's Word at the right time. Much that is unnecessary remains unsaid. But what is essential and helpful can be said in a few words. The greatest service of listening that God has entrusted to us is hearing the confession of our brother.¹³ So, finally, to bear the burden of the other person means involvement with the created reality of the other, to accept and affirm it, and, in bearing with it, to break through to the point where we take **joy** in it.¹⁴ [pause]

Believers bear each other's burdens, as Christ bore their sins and still bears them today. All this calls to mind what Bonhoeffer had already said in *The Cost of Discipleship*, published a year earlier, in 1937.

God is a God who *bears*. The Son of God bore our flesh, he bore the cross, he bore our sin, thus making atonement for us. In the same way his followers are also called upon to bear, and that is precisely what it means to be a Christian. Just as Christ maintained his communion with the father

¹³ Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), 110-122, which should be understood in the light of the historical context (the seminary) and James 5:16. See also Luther's Large Catechism, "A Brief Exhortation to Confession."

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 100-101, 95, 98-99; Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 5 *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, 101, 98-99, 85. Adapted. Cf.: "[I]ntercession is the most promising way to reach our neighbors, and corporate prayer, offered in the name of Christ, the purest form of fellowship" (Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 110).

by his endurance, so his followers are to maintain their communion with Christ by their endurance. We can of course shake off the burden which is laid upon us, but only find that we have a still heavier burden to carry – a yoke of our own choosing, the yoke of our self. But Jesus invites all who travail and are heavy laden -

And here I often ask my students: who is this? Are you tired, heavy laden? Yes. Yes, this describes us all, doesn't it?

Jesus invites all who travail and are heavy laden to throw off their own yoke and take his yoke upon them – and his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. The yoke and the burden of Christ are his cross. To go one's way under the sign of the cross is not misery and desperation, but peace and refreshment for the soul. It is the highest joy attainable in this life. Then we do not walk under our self made laws and burdens, but under the yoke of him who knows us and walks under the yoke with us. Under his yoke we are certain of his nearness and communion. It is he whom the disciple finds as he lifts up his cross.¹⁵

The disciple also finds his brothers and sisters, his family, his community.

The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. The believer feels no shame, as though he were living too much in the flesh, when he yearns for the physical presence of other Christians. Man was created a body, the Son of God appeared on Earth in the body, he was raised in the body, in the sacrament the believer receives the Lord Christ in the body, and the resurrection of the dead will bring about the perfected fellowship of God's spiritual-physical creatures. The believer therefore lauds the Creator, the Redeemer, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the bodily presence of a brother. The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. Visitor and visited in loneliness recognize in each other the Christ who is present in the body; they receive and meet each other as one meets the Lord, in reverence, humility, and joy. They receive each other's benedictions as the benediction of the Lord Jesus Christ. But if there is so much blessing and joy even in a single encounter of brother with brother, how inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who by God's will are privileged to live in the [regular, weekly, even] daily fellowship of life with other Christians!

It is true, of course, that what is an unspeakable gift of God for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden under foot by those who have the gift every day. It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the Kingdom of God that any day may

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 102-103.

be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter loneliness may be brief indeed. Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: it is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren! [pause] (19-20 [Harper edition]).

Well, then, you better get to work creating this community now..., right? [pause]

Well, listen, there is much, much good in the two other books we were requested to read, *Ancient-Future Worship* and *Deep Church*,¹⁶ not the least of which is the overlapping commitment to the history of the Church – its doctrine and practice – along with a resultant care and outreach to all, not to mention author Jim Belcher's highly recommending *Life Together*. However, time does not permit me to offer any kind of full assessment of Belcher's and Webber's works. But let me say this, you do not need a seven- or ten-step plan for creating community: Number one, because YOU cannot create it; no ANOTHER does that. And number two, because the deep, holy, Christian church is **already** a fact, "the Church *is* the congregation, the communion of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered" (AC 7; see *LT*, Works ed., 28). Christian community is a reality revealed to be received not a human project to build.

Let me quote several pages from *Life Together* here: "We ARE members of one body. This is not a theory, but a spiritual reality that is often experienced in the Christian community with shocking clarity, sometimes beneficially and sometimes destructively" (92, adapted). "On innumerable occasions a whole Christian community has been shattered because it has lived on the basis of a wishful image. Certainly serious Christians who are put in a community for the first time will often bring with them a very definite image of what Christian communal life should be, and they will be anxious to realize it." Sounds like most of us the first few months in the ministry, right? "But God's grace quickly frustrates all such dreams." Sounds like most of us the first few months in the ministry, right?!

Just as surely as God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely must we be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves.

By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world. He does not abandon us to those rapturous experiences and lofty moods that come over us like a dream. God is not a God of emotionalism but the God of truth. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it.

¹⁶ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) and Jim Belcher, *Deep Church* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2009).

The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community, the better for both. A community which cannot bear and cannot survive such a crisis, which insists upon keeping its illusion when it should be shattered, permanently loses in that moment the promise of Christian community. Sooner or later it will collapse. Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and ever so earnest and ever so sacrificial.

God hates this wishful dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions an idealized image of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own laws, and judges the brethren and God himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of the brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together.

When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing and pathetic accuser of himself.

Because God has **already** laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians **in Jesus Christ**, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by his call, by his forgiveness, and his promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us; we rather thank God for what he does give us daily.

And is not what has been given us enough!? - Brothers, who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of his grace? Is the divine gift of Christian fellowship anything less than this, any day, even the most difficult and distressing day?

Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Christ Jesus?! Each individual's sin burdens the whole community and indicts it, but the community of faith rejoices amid all the pain inflicted on it by the sin of the other and, in spite of the burden placed on it, rejoices because it is

deemed worthy of bearing with and forgiving sin. “Behold, you bear with them all and likewise all of them bear with **you**, and all things are in common, both the good and the bad” (Luther). Thus, the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by the one Word and Deed which really binds us together--the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. (*LT* [Harper ed.], 26-28, 103).

I would add here that I think it no accident that in the Creed, after we confess the “holy Christian Church, the communion of saints,” we immediately confess “the forgiveness of sins.” [pause]

So, when the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship.

Only those who give thanks for little things receive the great things as well. We prevent God from giving us the great spiritual gifts prepared for us because we do not give thanks for daily gifts. We think that we should not be satisfied with the small measure of spiritual knowledge, experience, and love that has been given to us, and that we must be constantly seeking the great gifts. Then we complain that we lack deep certainty, the strong faith, and the rich experiences that God has given to other Christians, and we consider these complaints to be pious! We pray for the big things and forget to give thanks for the small (and yet really not so small!) gifts we receive daily. How can God entrust great things to those who will not gratefully receive the little things from God’s hand? If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty; if on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry and petty, so far from what we expected, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow according to the measure and riches which are there for us all in Jesus Christ.

This applies in a special way to the complaints often heard from pastors and zealous members about their congregations. A pastor should not complain about his congregations, certainly never to other people, but also not to God. A congregation has not been entrusted to him in order that he should become its accuser before God and men. When a pastor becomes alienated from a Christian community in which he has been placed and begins to raise complaints about it, he had better examine himself first to see whether the trouble is not due to his wish dream that should be shattered by God; and if this be the case, let him thank God for leading him into this predicament.

But if not, let him nevertheless guard against ever becoming an accuser of the congregation before God. Let him rather accuse himself for his unbelief. Let him pray to God for understanding of his own failure and his particular sin, and pray that he may not wrong his brethren. Let him, in the consciousness of his own guilt, make intercession for his brethren. Let him do what they have been instructed to do, and thank God.

Like the Christian's sanctification, Christian community is a gift of God to which we have no claim. Only God knows the real condition of either our community or our sanctification. What may appear weak and trifling to us may be great and glorious to God. Just as the Christian should not be constantly feeling his spiritual pulse, so, too, the Christian community has not been given to us by God for us to be constantly taking its temperature. The more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more surely and steadily will fellowship increase and grow from day to day **as God pleases**. *Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.* The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ alone, the more calmly we will learn to think about our community and pray and hope for it. (*LT*, 28-30).

These ideas echo and expand on what Bonhoeffer preached five years earlier at the July 23, 1933 church elections, which was to see a great victory for the so-called German Christians, supporters of the National Socialist party, and the formation of the *Deutsche evangelische Kirche*, that is, Hitler's Reich Church.¹⁷ In a sermon based on Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, Bonhoeffer proclaimed – and think, just think of that historical context as you hear his word – Bonhoeffer preached:

It is not we who build. [Christ] builds the church. No man builds the church but Christ alone. Whoever is minded to build the church is surely well on the way to destroying it; for he will build a temple to idols without wishing or knowing it. We must confess—he builds. We must proclaim—he builds. We must pray to him—that he may build.

We do not know his plan. We cannot see whether he is building or pulling down. It may be that the times which by human standards are times of collapse are for him the great times of construction. It may be that the times which from a human point of view are great times for the church are times when it is pulled down.

It is a great comfort which Christ gives to his church: you confess, preach, bear witness to me and I alone will build where it pleases me. Do not meddle in what is my province. Do what is given to you to do well and you have done enough. But do it well. Pay no heed to views and opinions. Don't ask for judgments. **Don't always be calculating what will happen.** Don't always be on the lookout for another refuge! Church, stay a church!

¹⁷ See Lowell Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler* (St. Louis: CPH, 2007), 90.

But church, confess, confess, confess! Christ alone is your Lord; from his grace alone can you live as you are. Christ builds.¹⁸

So we are not in panic mode when it comes to the Word and the world, when it comes to the church counterculturally¹⁹ engaging the culture. No, for we trust in the efficacy of the Word as Christ and culture are held in paradoxical tension. Because we are confident in our identity, we are confident in our mission, in our place in this world. As such, Bonhoeffer begins *Life Together*: “Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the Cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There is his commission, his work.”²⁰ For Bonhoeffer there is a “...profound **this-worldliness** of Christianity.” In the last year of his life he explained this term in one his prison letters to his best friend,²¹ relative, and ultimately biographer Eberhard Bethge:

I don't mean the shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable, or lascivious, but the profound this-worldliness characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection. I think Luther lived a this-worldly life in this sense. It is only by living completely in this world that one learns to live by faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be saint or converted sinner or churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing, we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is *metanoia*; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian! I'm glad to have been able to learn this, and I know I've been able to do so only along the road I've traveled. So I'm grateful for the past and present, and content with them. ...
May God in his mercy lead us through these times; but above all, may he lead us to himself. ...
I'm traveling with cheerfulness and gratitude along the road where I'm being led. My past life is brim-full of God's goodness, and my sins are covered by the forgiving love of Christ crucified.²²

We are confident in our identity. And so, we know and believe, **we confess** who we ARE as the authentic Christian community in and for the 21st century: For “...what

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 216-217.

¹⁹ See Belcher, *Deep Church*, 195.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 17-18.

²¹ See Bethge, *Friendship and Resistance: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), especially “Bonhoeffer's Theology of Friendship,” 80-104.

²² 21 July, 23 August 1944. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 369-370, 393.

does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom 10:8-10). The belief of the heart and the confession of the mouth is one act of faith. This confessional fidelity entails both a clear understanding of what, Who, it is we believe, and a consequent sharing of that faith with others. It means a commitment to Scripture, and to the creeds, confessions, and doctrine of the Church as handed down to us by those who came before (1 Cor 11:2, 2 Th 2:15). And it must answer post-modern man by pointing him outside of himself—*extra nos*—to another who exclusively is the way, the truth, and the life, not one of many, even Jesus Christ, our Lord (Jn 14:6). Here it might be important to note, Dean Wenthe points out,

the service of the intellect to the mission of Christ. At times voices have suggested that to be truly evangelistic is to engage in a minimal amount of reflection and thought. There is simply a false antipathy when education is pitted against mission, or mission against education. Particularly in our time, when our prevailing culture is in such a state of flux, the church is called to use her best thinkers to name those forces that destroy human beings and to point to the Lord, the suffering Servant, who alone can renew and restore human life [and community]. Thought and mission, [intellectual rigor and confession of the faith,] are inexorably woven together when the church is at [her] best. A passion for the lost calls one to think creatively and faithfully about how people shape their self-understanding and what forces are [trying to define] them.²³

Bonhoeffer continually emphasizes the incarnational, everyday realism of the Christian revelation. “The basis,” he says “of spiritual community is truth; the basis of emotional community is desire. In the spiritual community the Word of God alone rules” (Works ed., 39, 40; cf. 47). Indeed, in *The Way to Freedom*, he adds: “God probably intends for only one thing to remain with us: God’s Word, sacrament, and promise. We ask for nothing else, because from giving us this there springs the incomparable gift of genuine community in faith, prayer, intercession, in mutual service, forgiveness, confession, discipline, and recognizing our sins and the mercy of Jesus Christ” (*The Way to Freedom* [New York: Harper & Row, 1966], 114, as quote in *LT*, Works ed., 139). Indeed, in his 1927 doctoral dissertation *Sanctorum Communio*, at age 21! – what were you doing at age 21! – in this dissertation Bonhoeffer notably defined the church as “Christ existing as community” (quoted in *LT*, Works ed., 7). We might say that Christ is present in, with, and from the gathered, if you will. Jesus is the Word of God present in the community of those with whom he baptismally identifies – Christians, “of Christ.” Or, to take it even further, “Christ *is* the Church,” as Bonhoeffer wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship* (270). Bo Giertz – and those of you who know me knew I would get Giertz in here somehow! – Giertz gives us the exegetical warrant for such thinking:

²³ Dean O. Wenthe, “Intellect as Servant of Christ,” *For the Life of the World*, October 2007:3.

That the Church is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22f; 5:23–30; Col. 1:18, 24) means first of all that the Church, and thereby the individual Christian, exists in a real life-giving connection with the risen Lord. In the same way as each member gets its life-strength, its warmth, its nourishment from the body, with which it is grown together, in the same way there is a real connection between the glorified, heavenly and immortal life of Christ **and** all the members of his church. The union is so intimate that Christ and the Church in certain circumstances become the same, so that one can say Christ, when one actually means the Church. We read in 1 Cor 12:12, ‘For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with *Christ*.’ Here we would have expected *ekklesia*, but Paul is so absorbed by the thought of the congregation [*församlingen*] as a part of Christ himself, that he here as a matter of fact says ‘Christ’ instead of ‘the Church.’ One can hardly express more strikingly how tremendously real the New Testament envisions the fellowship between Christ and his body, the Church.²⁴

Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on the objective reality, the corporate objective reality of Christ and thus of his body, the Christian community, commences with the concrete sacramental emphasis on the call as baptismal, as I’ve already demonstrated, and also finds its final breakthrough and sustaining power in the sacraments of Confession and Communion, the subjects of the last chapter of *Life Together*:

He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness. The final breakthrough to fellowship does not occur, because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. But the fact is that we *are* sinners!

It is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that it confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you. He wants you as you are; He does not want anything from you, a sacrifice, a work; He wants you alone. ‘My son, give me thine heart’ (Prov. 23:26).

God has come to you to save the sinner. Be glad! This message is liberation through truth. You can hide nothing from God. The mask you wear before men will do you no good before Him. He wants to see you as

²⁴ *Christ’s Church*, 18 of unpublished PDF manuscript, trans. Hans O. Andræ. Forthcoming from Wipf & Stock later this year (2010). *Församlingen* means, literally, “those gathered [for a purpose]” or “the assembly” and can also be translated as “parish” or “church.” See also Acts 9:4.

you are, He wants to be gracious to you. You do not have to go on lying to yourself and your brothers, as if you were without sin; you can dare to be a sinner. Thank God for that; He loves the sinner, but hates the sin (Works ed., 108).

Thus Bonhoeffer explained “that the goal of all Christian community is to encounter one another as bringers of this message of salvation. Their community is based only on Jesus Christ and his ‘alien righteousness.’ The community springs solely from the biblical and reformation message of the justification of human beings through grace alone” (32), even as “the Church is still the community of those whose **sanctification** is [also] Christ alone” (CD, 330). Note, the sanctification is not only FROM Christ, it IS Christ.

But this one goal is twofold, because confession and its forgiving grace prepare the community for Communion. Created in the image of a God who is community – three persons – we have the mystical union with Christ through faith and in the Sacrament – 1 Corinthians 10 – and so “the fellowship of the holy Lord’s Supper is the superlative fulfillment of Christian community. Just as members of the community of faith are united in body and blood at the table of the Lord, so they will be together in eternity. Here the community has reached its goal. Here joy in Christ and Christ’s community is complete. The life together of Christians under the Word has reached its fulfillment in the sacrament.” (118). [*long pause*]

Bonhoeffer’s words in *Life Together* on solitude and community proved prescient and prophetic for the course of his own life: One year after he penned those thoughts already mentioned about the loneliness of the sick, the exile, and the **prisoner**, and the blessing of and hope for brotherly visitation and companionship, he joined, in 1939, the *Abwehr*, military counterintelligence; this was the seat and center of the concealed German resistance against Hitler and the Third Reich. His participation led directly, in 1943, to his arrest for involvement in a successful *Abwehr* operation that enabled 14 Jews to escape from Germany. He was also charged with “using his travels abroad for nonintelligence matters, and misusing his intelligence position to keep Confessing Church pastors out of the military.”²⁵ According to his fiancée, Maria von Wedemeyer, during his imprisonment, “He claimed that the only [book of his] of concern to him at that moment was *Life Together*....”²⁶

So, it’s no surprise that, while in prison, Bonhoeffer yearned for the nearness of family and friends, and paradoxically felt himself alone even in the company of his fellow prisoners. He speaks to these emotions powerfully, movingly in his poem on community, identity, and God, entitled “Who Am I?:”

Who am I? They often tell me
I would step from my cell’s confinement

²⁵ Ford, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the German Resistance,” 2 at http://www.germanresistance.com/documents/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer_and_the_German_Resistance_%2795.pdf; Todd Temple and Kim Twitchell, *20th Century People Who Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 2000), 21. “Operation 7” originally was to assist seven Jews, a total which ultimately grew to 14.

²⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 416.

calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They often tell me
I would talk to my warders
freely and friendly and clearly,
as though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me
I would bear the days of misfortune
equably, smilingly, proudly
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I know of myself,
restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,
yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,
tossing in expectation of great events,
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,
fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.²⁷ [pause]

Apparently under Hitler's direct orders, Bonhoeffer was executed on April 9, 1945,²⁸
joining the holy Christian church triumphant, the community of saints at rest.
Thank you.

²⁷ July 1944. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 347-348. Cf. Rom. 14:8.

²⁸ Ford, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the German Resistance," 2; Todd Temple and Kim Twitchell, *20th Century People Who Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 2000), 21.

The following appendixes are added as answers to questions raised at the conference during the discussion periods. They are adapted experts from Eric R. Andrae, "Pro Deo et Patria: Themes of the Cruciform Life in Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72:1, January 2008:71, available at: <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/andraeprodeoetpatria%20themesofthecruciformlifeindietrichbonhoeffer.pdf>

Appendix A: Non-Religious Language

Perhaps the most widely controversial aspect of Bonhoeffer is his prison cell musings on so-called non-religious language. His reflections on a "non-religious interpretation of Christianity" have caused more controversy and more debate than maybe any other aspect of his life and teaching, including his resistance to Nazi totalitarianism. However, his questions on this issue, in personal letters, while incarcerated, are actually not worthy of any great amount of consideration, let alone a whole movement that claims God is dead. A brief explanation is in order.

Only *once* does Bonhoeffer use the phrase "non-religious Christianity."²⁹ And even then, in a letter to Bethge, it is in order to ask a hypothetical question regarding a definition of the same. Bethge maintains that the more common Bohoefferian phrase is "'Nonreligious interpretation,' [which] means Christological interpretation. It might not mean that for others, but it did for Bonhoeffer."³⁰ Indeed, in "thinking about how we can reinterpret in a 'worldly' sense...the concepts of repentance, faith, justification, rebirth, and sanctification," Bonhoeffer specifically references John 1: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...."³¹ Bonhoeffer also expressly discusses justification, and uses Paul and circumcision as an analogy: "The Pauline question whether [circumcision] is a condition of³² justification seems to me in present-day terms to be whether religion is a condition of salvation."³³ One extremely important point of note here is that Bonhoeffer *never* in fact defines "religion" or "develops any closed theory of religion,"³⁴ though he does normally seem to equate it with the outward trappings, the externals, even the anthropocentric and thus perhaps self-righteous elements of worship. Nonetheless, he does not systematically identify it. Indeed, "It seems that Bonhoeffer is using the word 'religion' in a way that not only makes a definition of its content difficult, but often does

²⁹ This is the correct translation of the phrase found in a 30 April 1944 letter to Bethge: Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 280.

³⁰ As quoted in Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 189. See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography. Theologian, Christian, Man for His Times*, 879.

³¹ 5 May. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 286-287.

³² Or, in both instances in this sentence: "prerequisite for..." (Ralf K. Wustenberg, *A Theology of Life: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998], 25).

³³ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 281.

³⁴ Some attempts: "human yearning [and striving] for God"; "cheap grace" (Wustenberg, *A Theology of Life*, 8, 14; cf. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 45-48). See also Martin Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker, vol. 3.2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 284.

not even try to provide any such definition.” This makes “the large number of misinterpretations understandable, all of which presuppose Bonhoeffer to be operating with a fixed concept of religion and then on the basis of this presupposition attempt to explain the nonreligious interpretation.”³⁵

That with which Bonhoeffer was struggling – and he admitted that he had yet to come up with a conclusive answer – was simply how to present the Gospel to an increasingly secularized world: evangelism, catechesis. “The day will come...when men will once more be called so to utter the word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it. It will be a new language, 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. ... (Jer. 33.9).”³⁶ Bonhoeffer himself never gave up traditional, biblical terminology.³⁷

Charles Ford helpfully alerts us to the fact “leading figures in the resistance, including members of [his] own family, were motivated by nineteenth century liberal thought and far from Christianity. It was specifically to address the latter that Bonhoeffer wanted to develop a ‘non-religious’ interpretation of Christianity. In approaching the liberal resistance, Bonhoeffer wanted to present Christianity gradually in ways that addressed issues which they were encountering.” Bonhoeffer was attempting to formulate an evangelistic paradigm, within the context of a catechetical model. “In this he appealed to early church tradition in which catechumens were asked to leave the liturgy before Holy Communion. His ‘non-religious’ language for Christianity was like a catechism. At some point the catechumens will be ready for traditional Christian language. One can notice how members of his family come gradually to speak traditional Christian language, especially as they faced execution.” Ford concludes by pointing out that after his “reflections on ‘non-religious’ language, Bonhoeffer himself returned to traditional language after the failure of the attempted assassination of Hitler. ‘My past life is brim-full of God’s goodness and my sins are covered by the forgiving love of Christ crucified.’”³⁸

Finally, it must be kept in mind that Bonhoeffer’s ruminations are discussing and asking questions on nonreligious interpretation in personal letters from jail to his best friend! Accordingly, he writes to Bethge:

You would be surprised, and perhaps even worried, by my theological thoughts and the conclusions they lead to; and this is where I miss you most of all, because I don’t know anyone else with whom I could so well discuss them to have my thinking clarified.

Forgive me for still putting it all so terribly clumsily and badly, as I really feel I am. But perhaps you will help me again to make things clearer and

³⁵ Wustenberg, *A Theology of Life*, 29, 27.

³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 300.

³⁷ See Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography. Theologian, Christian, Man for His Times*, 881. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Reflections on the Bible: Human Word and Word of God* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 83.

³⁸ Ford, e-mail to this writer, 18 June 2006. Also published as “Luther and Bonhoeffer misunderstood,” *Christian News*, 3 July 2006: 23. Some have called these leading figures in the resistance, whom Bonhoeffer was trying to reach, “homesick humanists.”

simpler, even if only by my being able to talk about them with you and to hear you, so to speak, keep asking and answering.

These theological thoughts are in fact, always occupying my mind; but there are times when I am just content to live the life of faith without worrying about its problems. At those times I simply take pleasure in the days' readings – in particular those of yesterday and today;³⁹ and I'm always glad to go back to Paul Gerhardt's beautiful hymns.⁴⁰

Those who try to isolate Bonhoeffer's theology based on one solitary aspect of his life and thought, are like those who attempt to dissect water; it cannot be done; Bonhoeffer's integrity of life and unity of thought will not allow it.⁴¹

Appendix B: Bonhoeffer and the Bible

As regards the authority of Scripture, he was not an inerrantist.⁴² If he were, it would have been nothing short of a miracle considering the German milieu in which he was born and bred as a theologian. Ronald Feuerhahn has pointed out that Sasse had to overcome the same barriers – and, granted a much longer life, he did and fully so.⁴³ Bonhoeffer was no historical higher critic, either, however – he thought it more or less useless for meeting the Word on its own terms and for the purpose intended.⁴⁴ Rather, he read the Bible faithfully all his life, and he read it meditatively, prayerfully,⁴⁵ Christocentrically, pondering every word in a passage,⁴⁶ sometimes for days or even weeks;⁴⁷ and he both preached and wrote⁴⁸ on it homiletically.⁴⁹ As is often the case with

³⁹ Though often a sharp critic of Pietism, Bonhoeffer made regular use of the brief “Daily Texts of the Church of the Brethren” (*Losugen der Brudergemeine*) which have been published since 1731. (See http://www.moravian.org/daily_texts/.) The readings to which he refers are Psalm 20:7, Rom 8:31, Psalm 23:1, John 10:14: “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the LORD our God;” “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?;” “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want;” “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.”

⁴⁰ 30 April, 18 July, 21 July 1944. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 279, 362.

⁴¹ Cf. interview with Eric Metaxas, *Mars Hill Audio Journal* 103, May/June 2010, Disc 2.3.

⁴² He believed in the inspiration of the original text. See Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 322.

⁴³ Interestingly, it was Sasse who called him a wonderful young Lutheran theologian and who said, “The longer [Bonhoeffer] lived the more Lutheran he became” (Hermann Sasse, while visiting Concordia Seminary, 1964, according to Robert Kolb and Charles Ford). Two of his latest complete works intended for publication were his two best: *Life Together* (published 1939) and *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible* (1940): Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, gen. ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., vol. 5 *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

⁴⁴ Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 44.

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 84-85. See also the section above on “Prayer.”

⁴⁶ “The Gospel...never speaks a superfluous word...” (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 43). “[E]very word of Holy Scripture was a love letter from God directed very personally to us...” (A student's recollection of Bonhoeffer's teaching as quoted in Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography. Theologian, Christian, Man for His Times*, 204).

⁴⁷ See Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, especially 30-41. No interruptions should be allowed during this quiet time; it should precede all other activities of the day. Certainly Bonhoeffer's admonition that we meditate because we “need help against the ungodly haste and unrest which threaten [our] work as...pastor[s]” (31), rings true for all.

Bonhoeffer, he has been labeled in opposite ways by opposite folk. Whereas one would consider him a radical, another would mark him as a biblicist.⁵⁰ He was neither. He was a man of the Word of God. The interpretation of Scripture in the theology of Bonhoeffer can be summarized in this way: his “view on the relationship between Revelation and Scripture is that revelation takes place by means of the Holy Spirit who works through the text of scripture, the presentation of Christ in the proclaimed word, and also the sacraments.”⁵¹

HANDOUT

“GOD SETS THE SOLITARY IN FAMILIES”

Authentic Life Together in the 21st Century as the Concrete Experience of an Eternal Gift

LCMS Eastern District Pastors’ Conference, Fall 2010

Eric R. Andrae, Campus Pastor, First Trinity, Pittsburgh - EricAndrae@gmail.com, 412-683-4121

Lecture Outline

1. Individual freedom and corporate call
2. Bearing, suffering one another
3. Fellowship as gift
4. Creating/building/dreaming of community?
5. “This-worldliness” and confessional fidelity
6. Christ as community
7. Confession and Communion in community
8. The goal(s) of community
9. “The end, but for me, the beginning of life”
10. Q&A/discussion with speaker

Items for “Table Talk” and “Group Discussion” -

⁴⁸ As an example of his approach, see Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), based on lectures delivered during the Winter semester 1932-33.

⁴⁹ The copy of the Bible he most often used throughout his life was the confirmation Bible of his brother Walter, who had died in World War I at the age of 19, and which Dietrich received at age 15.

⁵⁰ For example, see Kleinhans, *Till the Night Be Past*, 64. Cf., especially, Bonhoeffer, “The Bible Alone” in *Meditating on the Word*, 40-48, a letter written on 8 April 1936, which is remarkable for its simplicity of faith in the reliability and authority of the Bible; as well as, Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography. Theologian, Christian, Man for His Times*, 204-206; Bonhoeffer, *Reflections on the Bible: Human Word and Word of God*; and a very helpful unpublished paper, Joel Shaltanis, *The Interpretation of Scripture in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Concordia Seminary, 2006, in which the author argues that Bonhoeffer must be understood in light of three distinct periods: pre-1931 (pre-conversion [see, e.g., Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography. Theologian, Christian, Man for His Times*, 202-206]), ca. 1932-1943, and 1943-1945 (imprisonment). One could even divide the second phase into two sub-periods: ca. 1932-ca. 1936 and ca. 1936-ca. 1943, as Bonhoeffer himself indicates such a break (see his comments regarding *The Cost of Discipleship* [begun 1933, published 1937] in Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 369-370; and cf. his view of Scripture as evidenced by the April 1936 letter, “The Bible Alone”). For a brief overview of Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic from a confessional Lutheran perspective see Timo Laato, *Romarebrevets Hermeneutik* (Gothenburg: Församlingsförlaget, 2006) especially 38-44, though Laato focuses on *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer’s doctoral dissertation (habilitation thesis) written in 1930; by 1932, Bonhoeffer, in a personal letter, mentioned he had himself “taken quite a dislike to [the dissertation]” (Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 149).

⁵¹ Shaltanis, *The Interpretation of Scripture in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, n.p.

1) **“Can the Church proclaim God’s command with the same certainty with which it proclaims the gospel?** Can the Church say with the same certainty: ‘We need a socialist economy’ or ‘Don’t go to war,’ as it is able to say: ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ Clearly both gospel and command can only be proclaimed with full authority when that proclamation is concretely addressed to a situation. [If the Church, armed with full expert knowledge of the situation should dare to say things like these, then the Church dares to present this command] as God’s law in the clear knowledge that the Church could be blaspheming the name of God, that it could be wrong and in sin. But the Church may speak it in faith in the Word that forgives sins, which is also meant for the Church. So the proclamation of the commandment is rooted in the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins” (Bonhoeffer, from a lecture at the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia, 26 July 1932; cited in Oswald Bayer, *Freedom in Response* [Oxford: 2007], 254).

2) **“All things consist in Christ” (Col. 1:17) was a central biblical text and theme in Bonhoeffer’s entire corpus – based on the following, explore this theme on your own and in your discussion.** “Whereas psychological community is based on utopian desire and unmediated fellowship, spiritual community is based on recognition of reality and relationships mediated by Christ. We have access to one another, joy in one another, community with one another through Christ alone” (*Life Together* [from the Works ed.], 32-35, 47). “In Jesus Christ the reality of God entered into the reality of this world. In Him all things consist. Henceforward one can speak neither of God nor of the world without speaking of Jesus Christ. All concepts which do not take account of him – of his presence – are but misleading abstractions” (*Ethics*, 192, adapted).

James Nestingen points out that God’s act in Christ is the hub from which all spokes, all other things radiate. Christ Jesus is the one true and only essential center, the one ‘in whom all things hold together.’ At the center of everything is a person, Jesus, not an idea, a system of rules and regulations, or a sequence of causes. Human experience is viewed only in light of Christ – who he is and what he has done. In Luther’s theological way, Christ’s person and work become the first and last premise in every theological argument.

3) **Discuss the relationship of the office of the ministry, authority, humility, and a pastor’s service to the community** in light of: “The bishop is the simple, faithful man, sound in faith and life, who rightly discharges his duties to the Church. His authority lies in the exercise of his ministry. In the man himself there is nothing to admire. Genuine authority realizes that it can exist only in the service of Him who alone has authority. Genuine authority knows that it is bound in the strictest sense by the saying of Jesus: ‘One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren’ (Matt. 23:8). The Church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the brethren. Not in the former but in the latter is the lack. The Church will place its confidence only in the simple servant of the Word of Jesus Christ because it knows that then it will be guided, not according to human wisdom and human conceit, but by the Word of the Good Shepherd. The question of trust is determined by the faithfulness with which a man serves Jesus Christ, never by the extraordinary talents which he possesses. Pastoral authority can be attained only by the servant of Jesus who seeks no power of his own, who himself is a brother among brothers submitted to the authority of the Word” (*Life Together* [Harper & Row], 109). **How does this speak to the need for pastoral meekness and humility versus arrogance and heavy-handed rudeness?**

4) **How does Wendell Berry’s description of a farmer who is considering the purchase of a piece of land speak to the pastoral call to the community of faith?** - “When one buys the farm and moves there to live, something different begins. Thoughts begin to be translated into acts. It invariably turns out, I think, that one’s first vision of one’s place was to some extent an imposition on it. But if one’s sight is clear and one stays on and works well, one’s love gradually responds to the place as it really is, and one’s visions gradually image possibilities that are really in it. Two human possibilities of the highest order thus come within reach: what one wants can become the same as what one has, and one’s knowledge can cause respect for what

one knows. The good worker will not suppose that good work can be made properly answerable to haste, urgency, or even emergency. It is the properly humbled mind in its proper place that sees truly, because - to give only one reason - it sees details" (*Standing by Words*).

5) **What is the effect of one person's sin on the community? What is the effect of confessed sin on the community?** Discuss in light of: "In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of a pious community. But the expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power. It has been revealed and judged as sin. It can no longer tear the fellowship asunder. Now the fellowship bears the sin of the brother. He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cast off his sin in confession and handed it over to God. Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God in the cross of Jesus Christ" (*Life Together*, 112-113). **Shame separates; thus, the world removes the shame, while the Word removes the sin.**

Furthermore, in light of what Bonhoeffer writes regarding confession and on the Lord's Supper, discuss the need for pastors to provide private confession for parishioners, as well as to have a father confessor of their own. Also, what does this mean for the frequency of our celebrations of communion?

6) For on your way home, **pray**, in light of this: "I can no longer condemn or hate other Christians for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble they cause me. In intercessory prayer the face that may have been strange and intolerable to me is transformed into the face of one for whom Christ died, the face of a pardoned sinner. Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the community must enter every day" (*Life Together* [Works], 90).

Further resources –

- Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), esp. section IV on "The Church of Jesus Christ and the Life of Discipleship"
- Bonhoeffer, *Reflections on the Bible: Human Word and Word of God* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004)
- Bonhoeffer, *Spiritual Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985)
- Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000)
- Theodore J. Kleinhaus, *Till the Night Be Past: The Life and Times of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (St. Louis: CPH, 2002)
- *Hanged on a Twisted Cross: The Life, Convictions and Martyrdom of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* – a film by T. N. Mohan, Gateway Films (1996)
- Andræ, "Pro Deo et Patria: Themes of the Cruciform Life in Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72:1, January 2008:71; <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/andraeprodeopatria%20themesofthecruciformlifeindietrichbonhoeffer.pdf>
- Andræ, "What is Truth?" *Campus Ministry in a Post-Modern Culture*, *Lutheran Theological Review* XVII, 2004-2005:7; <http://www.brocku.ca/concordiaseminary/LTR/LTR%20XVII.pdf>
- Concordia Seminary Convocation Series, September 2009 – January 2010, on *Life Together*. Available at iTunes. (N.B. I stole part of my sub-title from one of the presentations.) See especially Joel Biermann's brief lecture on morality and repentance, five minutes into the fourth convocation.
- "Bonhoeffer's Cell" yahoo-group began its ongoing discussion of *Life Together* on 22 September - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bonhoefferscell>
- "Insights for Advent Preaching from Bonhoeffer, Thielicke, and Ebeling," Preaching Seminar, 9-10 November 2010, Prof. John T. Pless, Ft. Wayne, In. – goodshepherdinstitute.org
- Lowell C. Green, *Lutherans Against Hitler* (St. Louis: CPH, 2007)
- Gene Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross* (St. Louis: CPH, 2010)

- Pless, “Contemporary Spirituality and the Emerging Church,” *CTQ* 71 (2007): 347-363; <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/plesscontemporaryspirituality.pdf>
- Brett McCracken, “The Perils of 'Wannabe Cool' Christianity,” *WSJ*, August 13, 2010; <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704111704575355311122648100.html>. Also: McCracken, *Hipster Christianity: Where Church and Cool Collide* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, 2010)