

Bonhoeffer's rationale for offering this interpretation of God's Word is based on the following:

If Christ is not wholly present in the sermon the church breaks down [because] the human word and God's word are not simply mutually exclusive; instead, God's Word, Jesus Christ, as the active Word of God that has taken on human form [the *human-God*] is the Word of God that has humbled itself by entering into the human word (DBWE 318).

Following his discussion of the form of Christ as Word, Bonhoeffer continues to sketch the form of Christ as the *human-God* Jesus Christ: "The God-human Jesus Christ as the one who, in his *pro-me* structure, is present in his person to the church as sacrament" (DBWE 12:315). Bonhoeffer's discussion on 'Christ exists as sacrament' gives us insight into his views on the sacrament, viz., that the complete presence of the person of Christ (the *human-God*) can subsist in the sacrament; this intimates an idea that was later adopted as Eucharist Christology.

Any discussion on the sacrament entails countless interpretations surrounding it, particularly on the 'how' raised by the Calvinists and the 'who is present in the sacrament' raised by the Lutherans. Regardless of these interpretations, Bonhoeffer's concern was only to explain "who is present" in the sacrament; and how this question needs to be answered. To this end, Bonhoeffer suggests two aspects: "First: Christ is wholly Word, and the sacrament is wholly Word. Second: The sacrament is different from the Word in that it has its right to exist in the church as sacrament" (see DBWE 12:318).

In reply to the question, "who is present in the sacrament" Bonhoeffer retorts that the bodily form of Christ is present. For Bonhoeffer, "the Word in the sacrament is the Word in Bodily form" (see DBWE 12:318). He explains that,

The sacrament is the form of the Word that, because God speaks it, becomes sacrament. The bodily form of the sacrament exists only through the Word, but only as Word, as Word in the bodily form. The sacrament, in the form of nature, engages human beings in their nature (DBWE 12:318).

In all likelihood, these expressions relating to the sacrament reveal Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the interrelationship that exists: first, between the 'bodily form of Christ,' 'the sacraments' and then the 'Word.' The expressions of the sacrament could also be conceived as Bonhoeffer's catalyst to formulate his idea: that "Christ is present in the community of the church bodily through the sacraments" (see DBWE 12:322). Bonhoeffer explores this idea further in his later writings, particularly in *Discipleship*.

Equally crucial for Bonhoeffer is that “one should not associate the sacrament with the hiddenness of a bodiless God, thereby allowing the sacrament to constitute a second becoming-human of God” (see DBWE 12:319). He affirms that the sacrament is precisely about Jesus Christ being “wholly” present in the sacrament as the *human-God*, and as “the ultimate humiliation of the *human-God*” (DBWE 12:319).

Bonhoeffer’s discussion on ‘Christ exists as sacrament’ is a clear example of his evolving views on the ‘two natures’ of Christ and the understanding thereof in relation to the sacrament. For Bonhoeffer Christology is not only about the possible union of divinity and humanity, but rather about the hiddenness of the *human-God* who, in his humiliated state, is exalted in the sacrament. Bonhoeffer constructs a Christology that he formulates from the sacrament, viz., that Christ exists as sacrament. Therefore, the question about “who is present” in the sacrament cannot be only analysed as a question about the divinity and humanity of Christ; but rather as who is present in the sacrament as the *human-God* in a humiliated form (see DBWE 12:320). In other words, the question that should be asked is this:

Who is the Christ who is present in the sacrament? This is the way the question must be put. The God-human, the Exalted One! Jesus exists in such a way that He is the one who is present in the sacrament *existentialiter* (DBWE 12:322).

Bonhoeffer affirms that Christ being the sacrament “is not a particular desire he [Christ] expresses or a characteristic” (see DBWE 12:322). Still, rather Christ exists “by nature as sacrament in the church” because Christ is the humiliated one (see DBWE 12:322).

To finish the sketch of the form of Christ as the *human-God* Bonhoeffer presents Jesus Christ as the “God-human Jesus Christ is the one who, in his *pro-me* structure, is present in his person to the church as church community” (DBWE 12:315). This last aspect of the ‘*pro-me*’ becomes an essential transition from the idea of sacrament to the church community. Not only does Bonhoeffer transition to a new concept, but he combines the two aspects of sacrament and community, expressed as “Jesus Christ exists by nature as sacrament in the community of the church.” Bonhoeffer deems this idea of “Christ as sacrament” as being related to “Christ as church community just as reality is related to form” (see DBWE 12:323f).

Synonymous with the idea that ‘Christ exists as a church community’ is Bonhoeffer’s view that

the church is the community that exists as the ‘new humanity.’ Bonhoeffer assumed this idea in his earlier writings but chose not to discuss comprehensively. The editors of *Christology* say that,

Bonhoeffer built upon the thesis of *Sanctorum Communio* that the Christ who exists as church community is the same Christ who embodies and personifies the new humanity as a whole (DBWE 12: 37f).

Bonhoeffer summarises Christ’s relation to the ‘new humanity’ in the following ways:

The *pro-me* structure means three things for the relation of Christ to the new humanity: Jesus Christ, as the one who is *pro-me*, is the firstborn in a large family; he is there for his brothers and sisters in that he stands in their stead. He stands for his new humanity before God, by virtue of his *pro-me* structure; and because Christ acts as the new humanity, he is in it, because in him God both judges the new humanity and pardons it (DBWE 12: 315).

Discussing this topic on synonymy, Aveling (1983:28) suggests that,

[Bonhoeffer] does not feel called upon, here, to treat this topic at length. He uses two, separate spatial metaphors to describe where the [Christ’s] presence takes place, that is, God meets humanity at the boundary of humanity’s existence; whereas, on the other hand God exists at the centre of human existence.

Bonhoeffer affirms that “Christ takes action as the new humanity ... [and] the church community is the form he takes,”; therefore, “as Word and sacrament Christ is present as church community; ... they are related” (see DBWE 12:323). Bonhoeffer explains what it means that Word and sacrament are [is] the church community, in the following way:

Word exists as the word of God’s church community ... not just as human words but words of the mighty Word of the Creator and by speaking it creates the form of the church community. Church community is Word of God; [and] the sacrament too is in the church community and is present as church community ... beyond the word in a bodily form. This form in which it becomes bodily present is the body of Christ himself, and as such it is at the same time the form of the church community. It is so in reality (DBWE 12:323).

The above summarises Bonhoeffer’s ideas on the interrelationship of Word, sacrament, and Christ being present as the church community. Bonhoeffer deduces that the *human-God* is actively involved in the church community in the form of Word where the sacrament is administered; and that the *human-God* is present in the form of ‘Christ existing as sacrament’ in the church community (see DBWE 12:323).

These explanations about the “presence of Christ in the threefold form of Word, sacrament and

church community” (see DBWE 12:314), encapsulate Bonhoeffer’s evolving views on the ‘two natures’ of Christ, as found in his analysis and interpretation of the relationship that existed between the Word, sacrament and the church community as discussed in this section.

Bonhoeffer concludes this section in *Christology* by saying that

... essentially this new humanity (church community) was only brought about by Christ the logos that became flesh [the *human-God*] and this reality is established in Jesus Christ; [because] Christ represents the whole history of humanity in his historical life (DBWE 1:147).

Subsequently, Bonhoeffer turns to discuss the aspect of the historical Christ in detail in his following section, specifically, the reality of Christ as a representative of the “history of humanity in his historical life” (see DBWE 12:328). If we take into account that Bonhoeffer frames his argument around the historical fact of Christ as a certainty, it would be accurate to say that the Christ who is present today in the community of saints is the historical Christ (see DBWE 12:328).

6.4 Part 2 – The Historical Christ

In this section of his, *Christology* Bonhoeffer discusses the historical fact of Jesus Christ and asserts (for Christian believers) with absolute certainty that the historical truth of Jesus Christ can be affirmed (see DBWE 12:329f). For Bonhoeffer, this assertion for believers includes two ideas:

[First], that the historical is that which is simultaneously here and now. When we can bear this contradiction, then the historical is an absolute, [and following] but the assertion that the historical is simultaneously present is made historically possible only through faith in the miracle that God accomplished in Jesus’s resurrection (DBWE 12:330).

In Part two of his *Christology* lectures, Bonhoeffer directs most of his attention to defending the theology of the incarnate Christ. He does so first by discussing the development of deviating Christian thought regarding Christ’s person. In turn, Bonhoeffer also directs his attention to the history of doctrines relating to Christ’s nature. In this section of *Christology*, Bonhoeffer also weighs up Christ’s person (nature) against the concept of negative (critical) Christology, particularly contrasting Christ’s person (nature) within the context of positive Christology. In this part of his lectures, Bonhoeffer presents his understanding of Chalcedon’s classical affirmation of Christ’s ‘two natures.’ He refutes the different heresies that denied Christ’s

person (nature). My discussion will include Bonhoeffer's formulations of the fourth and fifth century's patristic council's stance against heresies – as well as his endorsement of the Chalcedon Definition. Amongst the heresies that Bonhoeffer refutes are the Docetic and Ebionite heresies, Monophysite and Nestorian heresy, and the Subordinationist and Modalist heresies. In his analysis of these heresies, Russell Palmer (1977:136f) calls them

... classifications of a series of developments in history of Christian thought which were judged by the church at large as deviations from the authentic doctrine of the person of Christ.

I begin by examining the development of deviating Christian thought specified by Bonhoeffer as 'negative Christology.' Negative Christology undermines the 'who' questions, that is, what is said about the 'two natures' of Christ and presents a false Christ. I will discuss Bonhoeffer's scrutiny of these heresies in the following order: First, the Docetic heresy, the Ebionite heresy, the Monophysite, and the Nestorian heresies, and lastly the Subordinationist and Modalist heresy and after that offer some concluding remarks.

Regarding the docetic heresy, Bonhoeffer asserts that the church should reject and identify any form of Docetism (Greek *dokein*, 'seem') as a false doctrine; because it purports that Jesus Christ has only the appearance of the godhead in history. Bonhoeffer identifies the "starting point for [Docetism] as the teaching of Apollinaris of Laodicea, an influential dogmatician of the early church" (DBWE 12:334). Apollinaris taught that the Word of God took on the nature of humans, but not the mind of a human, the very thing that controlled the human's personality. "Thus, God's appearance in human nature is becoming human, but with the elimination of the individuality that is characteristic of human nature" (DBWE 12:334). Bonhoeffer identifies three characteristics of Docetism. First, this heresy was an "attempt to make the incarnation of Christ so comprehensible that Jesus Christ is understood as only the appearance of the godhead in history" – Christ is not the essence of God's nature but merely a garment (see DBWE 12:332). Second, this heresy presented an abstract view of God and a motive for thinking of redemption in a certain way. Redemption became nothing else than the "liberation of human beings to their true nature" and the term "Christ becoming human" for our redemption, was "understood as nothing other than the prerequisite for our redemption, as God's taking on the

nature and essence of humanity” (see DBWE 12:333). Docetism taught that “God’s taking on the nature and essence of humanity” did not imply God’s relinquishing His individuality; because he only took on the essence of humans (see DBWE 12:333). After all, a Docetist would say: If God became fully human, then how could he redeem humanity?

Palmer (1977:136) specifies that Docetism is defective in the following ways: At first, Docetism stresses too one-sidedly the divine nature of Christ, portraying him primarily as God, calling the genuineness of his personhood into question. Following that, Docetism tends to deny that Christ is human like us; Christ only seemed to be human, but he was divine. Therefore, Docetism portrays the idea of God wherein Christ is understood as merely an appearance of this idea of God – Christ is not fully human nor fully God.

Next, Bonhoeffer turns his attention to a completely different heresy, namely the Ebionite heresy, which found its roots in Jewish heritage. This heresy taught the cross of Christ as a stumbling block. In Jewish culture, it was blasphemous to place any human at the same level as God or similarly conceive of any human as divine. Given these apprehensions, Ebionites rejected the divinity, supernatural birth, and pre-existence of Christ altogether. However, for Ebionites, ‘Christ significance comes through his baptism [and it is] here that Christ is accepted as the Son of God’ – although notably not one with God in substance but status.

Palmer points out that Ebionitism can be described in the following ways: Its adherents assumed that if you affirm Christ’s humanity as they did, then you deny the deity of Christ. Alternatively, they believed that if you “give exclusive emphasis to the manhood of Christ, so that Jesus is seen as a human who was ‘adopted’ by God, then it becomes questionable whether we can speak of an incarnation of God in him” (Palmer 1977:136). These beliefs adopted by Ebionites made it easy for them to “see how Jesus is human, but [not] how he is divine” (Palmer 1977:136).

I have noted thus far that Bonhoeffer voiced his dissent toward both the Ebionite and Docetic heresies in every way – yet in his *Christology* lectures, he does not offer any solutions to combat their heresies. Bonhoeffer maintained that,

... the positive statement on the becoming human must tread a middle path between the docetic and the Ebionite heresies. Between the two 'how' questions of the docetic and Ebionite theology, we must just keep our eyes upon the 'who' question (DBWE 12:340).

In summary, it must be said that the Ebionite and Docetic heresies negatively affected the interpretations of God becoming human. For this reason, Bonhoeffer asserts that we need to perceive the person of God in the following way. "God as human being, and human being as God, must be held together in our thinking at the risk of sacrificing the rationality of such assertions" made by the Ebionite and Docetic heresies (DBWE 12:340).

The Monophysite and Nestorian heresies are associated with the issues of the divinity of Christ. It is "within the doctrine of the God's humanness of Christ" discussion that these heresies developed (see DBWE 12:340). Bonhoeffer affirms that for a Monophysite, all the events of salvation history are fulfilled in human nature "according to the oneness of nature" (see DBWE 12:340). Monophysitism stressed that,

Christ is not an individual person; instead, he put on human nature like a garment. He did suffer and thirst and wept as we do, but he did so because he wanted to, not because it was his nature (DBWE 12:340).

Alternatively, Nestorians taught that Jesus' nature, as described in the Bible, is different from our understanding. Nestorians explained that Jesus had two distinct natures and had two different persons. They claimed that we could read in the Bible "that Jesus was an individual person, with all the weaknesses of a human being as such, a human being who did not claim to be omniscient" (see DBWE 12:301). Nestorians believed that Christ's humanness was to be understood in the fullest, realistic sense as a "perfect human being" and that two distinct natures are present in Christ, and not unity in substance, for the latter would be an offense against the Creator" (DBWE 12:301).

Vigorous debates raged between the Monophysites and the Nestorians over the dogma of the 'two natures' of Christ. Monophysites promoted a mysterious unity between the human and divine nature, whereas the Nestorians promoted an apparent particularity between the human and divine nature. Nestorians developed their Christology to explain the incarnation of the divine logos above the mysterious unity of the human and the divine rationally. Bonhoeffer stressed that,

Monophysitism had to be rejected as heresy because it allowed the human nature of Christ to be swallowed up in divine nature. Furthermore, it led to speculation about the nature of God and of the human being, through which the identity of God with the human is ultimately expressed. Nestorianism had to be rejected because it allowed the humanity and divinity to be so torn apart that the unity of Christ's person could no longer be conceived, so that one could no longer speak of God's becoming human (DBWE 12:341-342).

Examining the teaching of the Monophysite's and Nestorians Palmer (1977:136) points out that Monophysitism and Nestorianism can be described in the following way:

... [the Monophysites] affirmed the unity of person, denying distinction between natures, viz., If we stress the oneness of his being as a single person, then the distinctiveness of his 'two natures' tends to blur, resulting in a fusion of divine and human into a third something (Palmer 1977:136).

By contrast, Nestorians sought "to preserve both Christ's deity and his humanity by stressing the coexistence of two complete natures in him," which causes it then to be "difficult to preserve the unity of his person" (see Palmer 1977:136).

Bonhoeffer strongly rejected the teachings of the Monophysites and Nestorians. He affirms that,

In opposition to both these fronts [Monophysites and Nestorians], the classical formulation of the doctrine of Christ as God was established in the Chalcedonian formula of 451.⁵⁴ There is only one Christ. But he has 'two natures' (DBWE 12:342).

Concluding his discussion on heresies in *Christology*, Bonhoeffer turns his attention to the last two heresies, namely the Subordinationist and Modalist. Regarding these heresies, Bonhoeffer was primarily concerned with the "assertions [they made] about the person of Jesus Christ as that of the God who became human in his sonship to God, in his substance (*homoousia*)" (see DBWE 12:350).

Homoousia is a concept that was put forth at the Council of Nicaea in 325 regarding Jesus'

⁵⁴ The Definition of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D). Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognised in 'two natures', without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of nature's being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

substance. The Council affirmed that,

Jesus was from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, very God from very God, begotten not made, of the same substance as the Father (Council of Nicaea in 325).

Although the concept of *homoousia* “has gone through various transformations” Bonhoeffer affirms that the Council of Nicaea maintained that “*homoousia* meant not similarity of substance but rather identity of substance” (see DBWE 12:350). Why was it so crucial for Bonhoeffer to affirm those, as mentioned earlier? This was of concern for Bonhoeffer because Subordinationists taught that Jesus is different from the Father and because a Modalist explained that God is a single person who, throughout biblical history, revealed Himself in three modes or forms. Besides, Bonhoeffer also believed that it was necessary to insist on *homoousia* as ‘identity of substance,’

Because this is the only way to maintain the biblical witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, because this is the only way we can speak of revelation [that] presupposes that the God revealed to us is identical with God himself, otherwise we would have not a revelation of God but only an appearance or an idea (DBWE 12:350).

Bonhoeffer concludes by stating: “So, to say that Christ compels us [is?] to say that Christ is identical with God in his substance” (DBWE 12:350). To depart from this teaching on ‘identity of substance’ was what Subordinationists did, because they were concerned about preserving God’s unity and monarchy, and believed that these would be destroyed if a second God existed. On the other hand, Modalists felt differently because they taught that “Christ is the *prosōpon* of God that is, the form in which God appears as Christ” (see DBWE 12:351). For Bonhoeffer, this “clear attempt to think of the unity of Christ and revelation together is what we have in Modalism” (see DBWE 12:351). In sum, a Modalist believed that Christ is simply a mode of the one God with no personal existence of his own.

Decidedly, as far as Bonhoeffer is concerned, all the heresies, as discussed above, are unimaginable since they all say something negative about the ‘two natures’ of Christ. Besides, Bonhoeffer opposed all the heresies that did not uphold the classical Chalcedon formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ. Bonhoeffer understood that the Chalcedonian Christological Definition finalised such heterodoxy referenced by these heresies. More specifically, his interpretation of the Chalcedonian Christological Definition may be considered as central to

his theological thought, given his intention to maintain the identity of the ‘two natures’ of Christ. The Chalcedon Definition of 451 helped Bonhoeffer to identify and combat these heresies. He was able to establish the relationship that Christ held as both human and divine, as the *human-God*. Bonhoeffer affirms this by saying:

What is being said with the Chalcedonian formula is this: that all options for thinking of all this together and in juxtaposition are represented as impossible and forbidden options. Then there is no longer any positive assertion that can be made about what happens in Jesus Christ. In him we are to think of all possibilities [about God and human beings] at once. This means that from the Council of Chalcedon onward, it is no longer permissible to talk about the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ as about things or facts (DBWE 12:342).

Given Bonhoeffer’s affirmation above, I maintain that he accepted the doctrine of the hypostatic union (the ‘two natures’ of Jesus), which was adopted as an orthodox doctrine by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. In the same way, Bonhoeffer stresses that “since the Chalcedonian formula, we can no longer say, how shall we think about the difference of the ‘two natures’ and the unity of the person? But rather: who is this human being who is said to be God?” (DBWE 12:350).

In studying Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the Chalcedon Definition of 451, Pangritz (1999:140) also states that “according to Bonhoeffer the doctrine of the *human-God* has found its ‘classical formulation’ in the Chalcedonian Definition” ... “In this, the person of Jesus Christ is perceived in ‘two natures,’ without confusion and without division.”

Along the same lines, Palmer infers that it was *asine qua non* within Bonhoeffer’s Christology and theology to express that Jesus existed as both human and divine as the *human-God*. Palmer presumes:

The fact that the Council of Chalcedon does this in its declaration that Christ is ‘two natures’ in one person is both its greatness and its limitation. In spite of liberal theology’s criticism of the Chalcedonian Definition, Bonhoeffer is basically positive about it. Not only does it repudiate the false theological content of the heretical Christologies, but it also entails the rejection of inappropriate thought forms (Palmer 1977:137).

The discussions thus far show that there are clear indications that limitations can be found in negative or critical Christology. Bonhoeffer set out to prove these limitations (the scope of the inadequacy of these heresies) so that he could construct a positive Christology on the

foundation of a negative Christology. Following the discussion on negative Christology, Bonhoeffer was bent on creating a positive Christology, viz., about the Christ who became human and the Christ as the humiliated and exalted one.

When Bonhoeffer speaks about positive Christology in *Christology*, he always relates it to the idea of *Menschgewordene* (the concept of God taking on our full humanity by emphasising the *human-God's bodiliness*). Positive Christology is about the question: Who is God really in his humanity? God, Bonhoeffer explains, is the one “who became human as we became human, he is completely human”; and we can say of “this human being, Jesus Christ, that he is God” (see DBWE 12:353). For Bonhoeffer:

Jesus qualifies the entire human being as God. It is God's judgment about this human being! It is God's Word, which takes this human being Jesus Christ and qualifies him as God (DBWE 12:354).

The above quotation then becomes Bonhoeffer's proposition as to what positive Christology represents, viz., that God became human as we are human. God took on our full humanity, and God took full responsibility for humanity through Christ, who became human.

Bonhoeffer cautions that,

... if we speak of the human being of Jesus Christ as we speak of God, we should not speak of him as representing an idea of God, but rather speak of his weakness and the manger (DBWE 12:354).

In fact, “we should speak not of God becoming human (*das Menschwerden*), but of the God who became human” (*der Menschgewordene*) (see DBWE 12:354). Bonhoeffer asserts, if we just think about the act or process of the God becoming human, then “it would involve the ‘how’ question to be found in the old doctrine of the virgin birth” (see DBWE 12:354). It would also include us in the matter of ‘how’ God became human. Then again, “the doctrine of the virgin birth is supposed to express how God becomes human,” that Jesus became like us (see DBWE 12:354). Whenever we involve the ‘how,’ Bonhoeffer cautions, then it became a question about the immanence of God and how God can enter into time (see DBWE 12:354). This issue was resolved in his earlier discussions on Christology, which I discussed in detail in the second section of this chapter.

After the discussion on positive Christology, Bonhoeffer shifts his attention to another aspect of Christology, viz., the idea of the humiliated and the exalted Christ. When describing Christ as the humiliated and the exalted one, Bonhoeffer does not reflect on the divine and human nature of Christ. His concern is the humiliation of Christ; and how the *human-God* existed (*des Menschgewordenen*) as the humiliated one. In effect,

To speak of Jesus being humiliated is not to put any limit on his divinity. It is a question put forth to Jesus as a human being, about his way of existing as a human being (DBWE 12:355).

Given that the question of humiliation is redirected toward Jesus' "way of existing as a human being," Bonhoeffer maintains that God being humiliated does not mean that

... the humiliated God is more human and less God; and to be exalted does not mean to be more God and less human. Both in being humiliated and in being exalted, Jesus remains wholly human and wholly God (DBWE 12:355).

To speak of Jesus, being humiliated does not only refer to Christ's divinity or humanity but also to his 'likeness in the flesh'. Bonhoeffer further explores this idea of 'likeness in the flesh' to 'humiliation' by using the Pauline phrase found in Romans 8:3, viz., "that Christ has taken on our sinful flesh" – our likeness in the flesh. In as much as Christ took on sinful flesh, the question remains: Who is this *human-God* who is humiliated? Jesus is the *human-God* who is humiliated and is the one who undoubtedly is the one who

... takes on the humiliated way of life as an act of the *human-God*. It is not to be separated in time from the act of having become human, but rather the *human-God* of history is always, already, the *human-God* who is humiliated, from the manger to the cross (DBWE 12:356).

The affirmations of both Jesus' divinity and humanity in the Christology lectures, was beneficial for my exposition on Bonhoeffer's understanding of the 'two natures' of Jesus Christ. Similarly, I ascertained that an aspect of continuity exists in Bonhoeffer's theology in both his lectures and earlier writings. In the next chapter (7), I will explore the possibility that continuity exists between *Christology* and *Discipleship*⁵⁵ and his later writings.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer's construct of his Christology in *Discipleship* is unvaried; he moves progressively from the idea of the *human-God* being present in Word, sacrament and church community; this he does in relation to discipleship and church practices.

In his *Christology* lectures, Bonhoeffer continually attempted to make the ‘two natures’ of Christ’s understandable to his students. He shared the understanding that Jesus Christ was a ‘manifestation’ of the Godhead in history, thereby qualifying the total human Jesus as God. Bonhoeffer criticized any attack against conciliar Christology, or what he called ‘negative’ or ‘critical’ Christology. He discusses this within the context of negative Christology, which refers to the critical Christology as developed in the ‘decisions of the councils who expressed only the conclusions of critical [negative] Christology,’ resulting in the negating of false views or heresies (see DBWE 12:332). *Christology* is a study particularly regarding the development and deviations of Christian thought that took place about the doctrine of the person of Christ, viz., his humanity, and his deity. We have also noticed that Bonhoeffer's focus on negative Christology is done in contrast to Christ’s existence within the context of positive Christology, which by contrast, “have always been launched by individual theologians” (see DBWE 12:332). Although Bonhoeffer believed that “the concept of heresy is a necessary non-negotiable factor for the confessing church” he rejected any kind of heresy as a form of ‘negative’ or ‘critical’ Christology (see DBWE 12:332). These included Docetism that taught that Jesus simply ‘appeared’ or ‘seemed’ to be human and the Ebionite position that ‘Jesus remained a concrete man, the creation of God’. Thus Bonhoeffer condemned all Christological heresies which denied the humanity of Jesus Christ and separated that humanity from the divinity of Christ. One can confidently say that in his *Christology* lectures, Bonhoeffer condemned all heresies that questioned the unity that exists between God and Jesus. He condemned all heresies that did not preserve the distinguishing feature of the ‘two natures’ of Jesus Christ, who is both human and divine (see DBWE 12).

In studying the developments in Bonhoeffer’s thought and theology, Palmer suggests that the progression of Bonhoeffer’s Christology in his lectures is quite apparent. Bonhoeffer first starts with divinity (Christ the *human-God*), then advances to humiliation (the humiliated Christ) and finally to exaltation (the exalted Christ). Palmer suggests that Bonhoeffer’s Christology did not change drastically in *Christology*, but “the emphasis on incarnation on the one hand and humiliation and exaltation on the other is replaced in the *Ethics* by the threefold pattern of

incarnation, cross, and resurrection” (see Palmer 1977:140). Palmer quotes Bonhoeffer to explain:

... the Christ of the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection, is a welcome antidote both to the humanistic reductionism of liberal theology and to the abstract theorising of orthodoxy as to how a divine principle and a human principle can be united (Palmer 1977:140).

Bonhoeffer’s arguments against ‘critical’ and ‘negative’ Christology mentioned in his lectures led him to the fundamental Chalcedonian Definition of 451, which described Jesus Christ as the same Christ in ‘two natures,’ without confusion and change, division and separation.



Chapter 7 Discipleship

7.1 Introduction

The initial English translation of *Cost of Discipleship* (1949, 1959) was first revised in 2001 from Bonhoeffer's 1937 German edition titled *Nachfolge* into the new English translation titled *Discipleship*. First published during Bonhoeffer's Finkenwalde period, this became one of his best-known books (at least in his lifetime). In the opening pages of *Discipleship*, we read about Bonhoeffer's anxiety. Kelly (1990:321) suggests that Bonhoeffer was disturbed "by his own self-seeking careerism at the university," and he was concerned that he might "possibly slip into a comfortable church ministry" (see Kelly 1990:321). As a result, a troubling question emerged; Bonhoeffer asked what he as a Christian was to do about the "impossible" demands of Christ's Sermon on the Mount (DBWE 4:37). Bonhoeffer's answer to this question was a simple call to obedience to Christ. He writes: "What we want to know is not, what would this or that man, or this or that church, have of us, but what Jesus Christ himself wants of us" (DBWE 4:37).

Although it is commonly claimed that *Discipleship* is a devotional book – a classic in spirituality – set out for Bonhoeffer's seminary students at Finkenwalde, the book is Christocentric in nature. My impression is that *Discipleship* is not a pronounced Christological book but rather the answering of questions about the call of discipleship to Christ, which renders the book Christocentric. I will argue that *Discipleship* is Christocentric in nature because Bonhoeffer continually comes back to the call of Christ-centeredness and to the call of discipleship, which remains an essential theme for Bonhoeffer in his later writings. In *Discipleship*, he answers the question as to 'what Jesus Christ himself wants of us.' Noticeably, like *Sanctorum Communio*, an implicit Christology exists in *Discipleship* although not so overtly expressed; but rather in scattered pieces written from different perspectives, particularly on discipleship of Christ.

Stephen Nichols explains the Christocentric nature of *Discipleship* in the following way:

For Bonhoeffer, living the Christian life begins with Christ, with his call to discipleship, with the cross. We live in Christ. We live from the cross. Or, as Bonhoeffer would prefer, reminding us that we live in community, 'we are the church beneath the cross' (Nichols

2013:56).

To expound Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Discipleship*, I will structure this chapter in the following way. The first section offers an introduction to the book. Section Two explains the background to the argument of *Discipleship*. The third section develops Bonhoeffer's Christology, focusing specifically on the sections on Christian living; and the paragraphs that relate to the call of Christ to discipleship. In the fourth section, I will develop Bonhoeffer's theology not so much his Christology in particular; but what he says or infers about the 'two natures' of Christ in *Discipleship*.

All of the above outcomes will be achieved by carefully choosing paragraphs that relate to the theme of the 'two natures' of Christ in *Discipleship*. I will not examine Bonhoeffer's Christology methodically by trying to follow Bonhoeffer's logic throughout the book, but I will focus specifically on those paragraphs that converge on Christian living.

Bonhoeffer scholars suggest that "whenever we look into Bonhoeffer on living the Christian life, we are always bumping into Bonhoeffer's Christology" (see Nichols 2013:52). For those paragraphs that converge on Christian living, I will let the text of *Discipleship* speak for itself. Also, the sections selected for a quotation will be significant in understanding Bonhoeffer's 'evolving' views on the 'two natures' of Jesus Christ; and his continued development both spiritually and theologically.

7.2 Background to the Argument of *Discipleship*

In the introduction to the New English Edition of *Discipleship*, the editors suggest that many issues disturbed Bonhoeffer while writing it, which provides the background against which *Discipleship* should be read. Bonhoeffer wrote *Discipleship* during a time of political turmoil in Germany with particular reference to Christian responsibility to political affairs; and toward the present-day church struggle, which confronted Christians in Germany. During this time, Bonhoeffer asked the problematic questions facing Christians: What Jesus wants, and what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ. These questions anticipated Christ-centered responses from the disciples concerning their spirituality, to their faithful discipleship in opposition to the Nazi ideology, and as confessing Christians. These questions, directed to disciples intending to

acquaint them with what true discipleship meant, became the main guideline of every chapter of his *Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer warned that this guiding theme “true discipleship” was not to be confused in the sense that Jesus assumed total control over the disciples, who would then be excused from personal responsibility (see DBWE 4:1, 6).

Following these questions, the editors of *Discipleship* maintain that most of Bonhoeffer’s insights on spirituality, church, and Christ found in *Discipleship* are derived from his earlier writings *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, sermons and seminars (see DBWE 4:2). If this is true, then I could argue that this presents us with a good case for continuity in thought and theology in *Discipleship*. It will also give us a new way of understanding Bonhoeffer’s expressions – particularly those related to being a disciple in church and community.

Besides presenting new ways of understanding what it means to be a disciple in church and community, Bonhoeffer also writes prolifically about his discontent with church leaders and the community of faith, especially in their response toward injustices perpetrated against humanity by the Nazi regime. The editors suggest that, at the time of publication of *Discipleship*,

... Bonhoeffer already was immersed in the unruly and risky task of serving an opposition church against a popular political movement and against churches that supported it (DBWE 4:2).

Bonhoeffer’s discontent toward the community of faith moved him to coin and expound on two phrases: ‘cheap grace’ and ‘costly grace,’ which in *Discipleship* is related to his frustration because of the church’s intolerance. For Bonhoeffer, discipleship is about how Christ can be lived out in the world through the Word (Scripture) despite the prejudice of the churches in Germany. Consequently, in response, Bonhoeffer uses Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) in *Discipleship* to skillfully construct a new way of being a disciple in church community; and to explain what it means to be a true disciple of Christ. Besides, Bonhoeffer also uses Scripture to warn the church against the dangers of blatant disregard toward Scripture, particularly in its tolerance toward injustice. On the whole, Bonhoeffer is solely concerned that Christians do not take the demands of the Sermon on the Mount seriously.

In discussing the churches’ neglect of Scripture and tolerance toward injustices brought about

by the Nazi regime against humanity Nichols suggests that,

The acquiescence to Hitler and the Nazi Party was ‘the presenting problem,’ as counselors might say; the real issue, however, concerned Scripture. Does the church take Scripture and all of its demands seriously? That, to Bonhoeffer, was the bottom-line question of the controversies of the hour. And as he saw things, his church did not submit to Scripture. In fact, this is one of the most fundamental questions for us to ask as disciples: Do we take Scripture and all of its demands seriously? We will have a warped view of the Christian life if we see Scripture as something to be negotiated rather than obeyed (Nichols 2013:44).

Since Bonhoeffer’s sole concern was that Christians should take the demands of Scripture seriously, he chose *The Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew Chapters 5-7) to construct a new way of being a disciple in church and community. Bonhoeffer uses *The Sermon on the Mount* to illustrate how it is possible to take the demands of Scripture seriously and concretely display the Word.

This idea that Christianity has to be displayed concretely in the community of faith is one that Bonhoeffer addressed at length in *Sanctorum Communio*. This suggests that continuity existed in Bonhoeffer’s thought and theology from his earliest work that he worked out further in *Discipleship*. Phillips supports this idea; he says Bonhoeffer’s *Discipleship* is his attempt to

... weave together the new Christology, the revised ecclesiology of his earlier works, and the themes of concrete proclamation and concrete obedience, which emerged from his scriptural studies (Phillips 1967:95).

Equally important to understanding the background and argument to *Discipleship*, we need to be cognisant of how Bonhoeffer chose to arrange the book. It becomes apparent that he decided to arrange *Discipleship* in two parts⁵⁶ to construct a coherent new way of being a disciple in church and community.

Part One of *Discipleship* serves as the scriptural background, based on the Gospels, to Part Two wherein Bonhoeffer develops his Christology, demonstrating how Pauline theology and the cost of discipleship belonged together. The Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount is the risen Christ existing as church-community. To follow Jesus’ teaching is to obey Christ as Lord and vice versa; it is to be united with Christ in his death and resurrection as members of his body

⁵⁶ As a result of the new title, *Discipleship*, the structuring of the book changed from four parts into two parts.

who obey his command. Only in this way is “cheap grace” overcome.

Part One is predominantly Bonhoeffer’s outworking of how to integrate discipleship with Scripture and the relationship of the disciple with Christ. These would include the disciples’ call of discipleship in obedience to Christ; and the disciples’ call to allegiance to the cross of Christ. Bonhoeffer uses these two aspects to outline his interpretation of *The Sermon on the Mount*, as found in Matthew Chapters 5-7.

Part Two of *Discipleship* is about Christology concerning the community of Jesus Christ, particularly taking into account how Christ exists as a church community, an exercise that becomes possible in the following ways. First, it is likely because Christ is the only mediator who can bring into being and create a new community. It is possible because Christ can establish an inseparable relationship between Himself and the church community – Christ exists as a church community (see DBWE 4:226,232).

Discussing the background to the life and theology of Bonhoeffer in relation to *Discipleship*, Bethge suggests that Bonhoeffer’s time in Finkenwalde was a time in his life of “quest for the costly nature of the message” (see Bethge 1967:44). Bethge asserts, “Bonhoeffer’s quests were always vehemently on the way towards positive discoveries which [Bonhoeffer] was quick to formulate in destructive criticism as in demanding practical steps” (Bethge 1967:44). Bethge also considers *Discipleship*, as Bonhoeffer’s most famous work in his lifetime, as representing an authentic unfolding of the Christological concepts developed in both *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* and his *Christology* lectures. For Bethge, “this claim of consistency [in Bonhoeffer’s writings] is not a claim of mere logical relationship” but rather a claim of observation of “an auspicious synthesis arising out of Bonhoeffer’s sensitive perceptiveness as he faced the challenges of his day” (see Bethge 1967:54). If *Discipleship* is indeed an unfolding of Bonhoeffer’s theology and Christological concepts, then it lays a sound foundation to investigate and determine whether a general Christology can be found in Bonhoeffer’s *Discipleship*.

7.3 Bonhoeffer’s Christology as found in *Discipleship*

I hypothesise, in this section, that Bonhoeffer's Christology, as seen in *Discipleship*, can be ascertained by a close reading of the book. The selections I chose from *Discipleship* are in no way systematic but are relevant to Bonhoeffer's Christology in general. More so, I decided the sections in which Bonhoeffer emphasises an incarnational theology (about the God who became human) that I conclude he unfolds Christologically in *Discipleship*.

In Part One of *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer emphasises that any understanding of discipleship needs to be observed in the confines of a Christological understanding of grace, an idea which he assumes very early in *Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer taught and understood that being a disciple of Christ meant living from grace, and in turn, the disciple's understanding of grace should say that the disciple would follow Christ – because this grace is costly (see DBWE 4:56). In coining the phrase 'costly grace,' Bonhoeffer highlights essential aspects of discipleship. First, he distinguishes 'costly grace' from 'cheap grace.' 'Cheap grace' is seen as "grace without Jesus Christ," whereas 'costly grace' is "conceived Christologically as a grace that causes the disciple to follow the Christ" (see DBWE 4:45). Also, the call to follow Christ is "the call of Jesus Christ which causes the disciple to leave their nets and follow him," and that is 'costly grace' (see DBWE 4:45). Bonhoeffer was convinced that one could only become a disciple when one was willing to follow Jesus. Therefore, this kind of discipleship "is costly because it calls to discipleship," and it becomes grace "because it calls us to follow Jesus" (see DBWE 4:45). Subsequently, Bonhoeffer explains that

... this grace is costly because it was costly to God, because it cost God the life of God's Son and because nothing can be cheap to us which is costly to God (DBWE 4:45).

The cost of grace, as explained above, demanded that God had to become flesh and assume human form and surrender this humanity through the death of Jesus. Nichols (2013:46) suggests, "to put the whole matter succinctly, Christology is the key for understanding Bonhoeffer's theology on 'costly grace' and also his view of the Christian life" in *Discipleship*.

So, how do the phrases, as mentioned earlier, 'cheap grace' and 'costly grace' relate to Christology? Feil (1985:78) suggests that "the phrase ['costly grace'] that caused much sensation is itself Christologically conceived," because it relates to the incarnation of God. He

holds that if not Christologically conceived the concept reverts to ‘cheap grace’; ‘cheap grace’ is a grace living without the incarnate and therefore cannot be Christologically conceived (see Feil 1985:78). To sum up, ‘costly grace’ concerns committing to a call and also with a commitment to follow a person, Jesus Christ.

I agree with Feil that in *Discipleship*, the phrase ‘costly grace’ has to be “itself Christologically conceived” because it relates to the incarnation of God.⁵⁷ Also, I propose that the words ‘costly grace’ itself refers to the incarnation of God for the following reasons. First, because Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Discipleship* adhered to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ, viz., that God as divine came to earth and took on humanity through Jesus Christ, which inevitably makes Jesus both human and divine. Secondly, Bonhoeffer stressed that the *human-God* (Jesus as both human and divine) died, which represented ‘costly grace’ because it cost God the life of His Son, signalling Jesus ‘vicarious representative action.’ The editors of *Discipleship* suggest that this idea, the ‘vicarious representative action,’ provided Bonhoeffer in *Discipleship* with all “the Christocentric foundation for all the associations [he] makes between the gospel presentation of the call of Christ to discipleship” (see DBWE 4:18).

Following the idea of the ‘vicarious representative action,’ from here on, nothing further is said by Bonhoeffer in Part One about the incarnation (the God who became flesh). This idea is extended when Bonhoeffer uses it again in Part Two regarding two crucial aspects, namely about the body of Christ as the representative to the church community; and how Christ is present today with the church community, in person, in ‘bodily form.’

The above two aspects set the stage for Bonhoeffer to explain how Christ can be present in ‘bodily form.’ Bonhoeffer characterises the meaning of Christ’s ‘bodily form’ in this way: Christ was present in ‘bodily form’ when he walked with the disciples but is more so present today in the community of faith through his word and sacrament. Since Jesus Christ is no longer truly present in the ‘bodily form’ but only through his word and sacrament, Bonhoeffer transitions and poses a related question: [Then] how ought a Christian to walk?

⁵⁷ The humanity of Christ is the one aspect that Bonhoeffer stresses most in *Discipleship*.

For Bonhoeffer, the above question can be answered in several ways: First, Bonhoeffer believes that the very question is redundant because every time we ask it, “we place ourselves outside the living presence of Christ” (DBWE 4:201). Alternatively, this question “refuses to take seriously that Jesus Christ is not dead but alive and still speaking to us today through the testimony of Scripture” (DBWE 4:201). Bonhoeffer supposes that Christ is still present ‘bodily’ and not dead but alive. He stresses that Christ is present with the church community today, in person (in ‘bodily form’) and word (see DBWE 4:202). The community of faith can only hear Christ’s call for discipleship within His community of faith, the church within which He is alive. Bonhoeffer concludes emphatically:

It is within the church that Jesus Christ calls through his word and sacrament [not to be misunderstood as a ‘second’ incarnation]; this is where Jesus Christ is present and thus we need no personal revelation (DBWE 4:202).

Bonhoeffer understood the ‘bodily form’ Christ took on as being grounded in the fact that God became human and is now wholly present in the community of faith (see DBWE 4:202). In *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer devotes a full chapter discussing more definitively and distinctively, the subject, the body of Christ as the community in which Christ dwells in ‘bodily form.’

Robert Vosloo elaborates on the bodiliness of Jesus with relevance to the church community:

For Bonhoeffer, the understanding of the body of Christ is of great importance for an understanding of the church. The focus on concrete community is intertwined with an understanding of bodily presence [of Christ]. This idea reverberates throughout his work. Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the body of Christ is grounded in the incarnation, or more correctly, the incarnate One. By bearing the infirmities and sorrows of humans in his own body, Jesus was able to heal the infirmities and sorrows of human nature. It is from this perspective that we can understand the nature of the bodily bond between Jesus and the disciples. This was not an accident but a consequence of the incarnation. However, the incarnate Son of God needed a *Nachfolge Gemeinde* (a community of disciples) who not merely participated in his teaching, but also in his body (Vosloo 2006:28-29).

From Vosloo’s observations, one can conclude that most of Bonhoeffer’s Christological accentuations in *Discipleship* led to the idea of the presence of Christ in a ‘bodily form’ – as found within the community of faith.

To sum up, Bonhoeffer’s idea of the ‘bodily form’ is related to the church community because it is “within the presence of the church that Christ lives and Christians live in full community with the bodily presence of a glorified Lord” (DBWE 4:213). Besides, since eternity God

designated that the bodily presence of Jesus would make the community of faith acceptable. Bonhoeffer understood that this was God's intention because "since Adam's fall, God sent the divine word to sinful humanity, to seek and accept us;" then "the miracle of miracles took place" (DBWE 4:214). Bonhoeffer stresses:

The miracle of miracles took place. The Son of God becomes a human being. The Word became flesh. The One who had dwelled from all eternity in the Father's glory, the one who was in the form of God, who in the beginning had been the mediator of creation so that the created world can only be known through him and in him, the One who was very God (DBWE 4:214).

Bonhoeffer further explores this expression 'the miracle of miracles' in relation to the Christmas story in a theological letter written in December 1939 that aptly reflects his thought on those as mentioned above. He begins by expressing that,

No priest, no theologian stood at the cradle of Bethlehem. And yet all Christian theology finds its origin in the miracle of miracles, that God became human. ... Without that holy night, there is no theology. 'God revealed in the flesh,' the God-human Jesus Christ, that is the holy mystery, which theology was instituted to preserve and protect (DBWE 15:528).

Bonhoeffer believed that if the 'sacred theology' of Christmas did ...

not succeed in kindling in us anew something like a love toward holy theology, so that we, captured and overcome by the miracle of the cradle of the Son of God, must devoutly ponder the mysteries of God – then it might well be the case that the fire of the divine mysteries is already extinguished and dead, even for our hearts (DBWE 15:529).

Bonhoeffer advances that we learn from the early church and should "consider three well-known teachings on Christology that continue to live on in our [the] Lutheran confession ... in order to place our thinking and our recognition as preachers of the word in the light of the holy night" (see DBWE 15:530).

First, it was important for the church to acknowledge that the Son "had taken on human nature but a human being. ... [and] This distinction was necessary for the preservation of the universality of the Christmas miracle" (see DBWE 15:530). Second, it was important for the church to acknowledge that the Son had

'two natures and one person' – in this paradoxical dogmatic formula, the early church dared to express its knowledge of Christmas. Dared, because it knew that something inexpressible had been expressed here, expressed simply because one could not be silent about it. Both were found and witnessed to in a manger: the humankind that was taken

on in the flesh and the eternal Godhead, both joined together in the one name, Jesus Christ, human and divine nature joined in the person of the Son of God (DBWE 15:531).

Third, Bonhoeffer acknowledged that,

... the contribution of the Lutheran Church to the Christology of the early church consisted of the teaching of *genus majesticum*, that is, the impartation during the incarnation of the attributes of the divine nature to the human nature [according to the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article 8,7] (DBWE 15:532).

Bonhoeffer avers that,

... while it certainly remains incomprehensible how human nature, which is our nature, could partake in the attributes of the divine majesty, the Scripture teaches it, and with this teaching the deepest and ultimate union of God with the human being is expressed (DBWE 15:533).

Bonhoeffer held that the teaching of *genus majesticum* is related to the Lords Supper. He concluded:

Indeed, from here the proper understanding of the Lord's Supper and the words of the Lord, 'this is my body' is first disclosed to Lutheran teaching. ... Thus incarnation and the Lord's Supper are intimately related. The doctrine of *genus majesticum* brings this correlation to light. The same God who came into the flesh for our sake gives himself to us through his flesh and blood in the sacrament (DBWE 15:533).

The above discussion sets the platform for the next section, introducing Bonhoeffer's expressions about the 'two natures' of Christ in *Discipleship*, which I expound in detail below.

7.4 Bonhoeffer's expressions concerning the 'two natures' of Christ in *Discipleship*

In this section, I will explore Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the 'two natures' of Christ as it is developed in *Discipleship*; particularly starting with the quotation above, "the miracle of miracles [that] took place ..." (see DBWE 4:214). We have noticed that key to Bonhoeffer's understanding of the incarnation (the God who became human) is the association of the bodily presence of Christ with the community of faith; Christ dwells within the community of faith, bodily.

In *Discipleship*, mainly Part Two, Bonhoeffer develops concepts he will explore in relation to the incarnation, viz. incarnation as the body of Christ, incarnation as the church community; and incarnation as the image of Christ. I will reference these concepts with Bonhoeffer's Christology. Also, these concepts will be examined to determine their significance in Bonhoeffer's Christology. I allow Bonhoeffer's 'evolving' views on the 'two natures' of Jesus

Christ to speak for itself.

Bonhoeffer's starting point for Christology in *Discipleship* is almost always the incarnation. By using the phrase "the miracle of miracles [that] took place ..." Bonhoeffer directly implies that "the Son of God becomes a human being [and] the Word becomes flesh," i.e., the incarnation (see DBWE 4:214). This one characteristic of Jesus' 'two natures,' his humanity, mentioned extensively in *Discipleship*, is linked simultaneously with the idea of Logos, namely concerning Jesus Christ as the one who became flesh. The design of the Logos, for Bonhoeffer, held the connotation of Jesus Christ's assuming flesh, thus '[taking] on humanity by taking on human 'qualities,' human 'nature,' 'sinful flesh' and 'human form' (DBWE 4:214).

Bonhoeffer stresses that Jesus Christ is the one "who had dwelled from all eternity" and is the "One who was in the form of *God*," as well as "the One who was very *God*" (Jesus' divinity) and "this One (the very *God*) assumes humanity and comes to earth" (see DBWE 4:214). However, in *Discipleship*, the one characteristic of the 'two natures' of Jesus, Jesus' divinity, is not expounded at length. Decidedly, the aspect of Jesus' humanity is the one that enjoys focus.

Bonhoeffer consistently endorses his adherence with one accord to the Chalcedonian Definition by referencing parts of it with regards to Jesus' manhood. This becomes obvious in *Discipleship*, quoting for instance:

... we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in *manhood*, truly God and truly *man*, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his *manhood*; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his *manhood* begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, 'begotten of the Father before the ages but yet as regards his *manhood* begotten, for us men and for our salvation (The Definition of the Council of Chalcedon 451 A.D.).

Indeed, in *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer repeatedly returns to the humanity of Jesus and how God accepts humanity in the body of Jesus Christ; through the Son in the flesh who shouldered all humanity. Jesus Christ, "the Son of God, accepts all of humanity in bodily form," and "in the body of Jesus Christ humanity is now truly and bodily accepted" (DBWE 4:214).

Although it seems plausible that God should choose a single, perfect human being, Jesus Christ, to accept humanity, it raised significant reservations with the early church fathers. Bonhoeffer remarks that,

... while contemplating this miracle, [that in the body of Christ all humanity is accepted], the early church fathers insisted passionately that while it was necessary to say that God had taken on human nature, it was wrong to say that God had chosen a single, perfect human being with whom God would then unite (DBWE 4:214).

This reservation dispelled any impulse in Bonhoeffer to change his understanding of how God became human; he adhered to the Chalcedonian Definition resolutely. The phrase “in the body of Christ all humanity is accepted,” Bonhoeffer understood as meaning “God took on the whole of our sick and sinful human nature, the whole of humanity that which had fallen away from God” (DBWE 4:215). There is no question that in these formulations, the “Son of *God* accepts all of humanity” and “*God* had taken on human nature,” Bonhoeffer continues to express his adherence to the Chalcedonian Definition. two natures

Bonhoeffer’s phrase starting with “the miracle of miracles that took place ...”, if taken as a whole, it would be viable to infer that this phrase sets the stage for Bonhoeffer to introduce expressions about the ‘two natures’ of Christ. I maintain that these expressions all confirm Bonhoeffer’s evolving views of the ‘two natures’ of Christ that he developed in *Discipleship*, and which he will develop further in his later writings. Rightfully, when Bonhoeffer conveys the idea that ‘the Son of God becomes a human being’ he confirms the divinity of Christ; and at the same time says God took on human nature by choosing a perfect human (‘the Son of God’), thus confirming the humanity of Christ. This meant that Jesus existed both as an individual self and a new humanity. Bonhoeffer expresses that Christ existed as both human and divine, and because of this “in the body of Christ, all humanity is accepted” (see DBWE 4:214).

In Part Two, Bonhoeffer continues to accentuate the humanity of Jesus (as the *human-God*) by saying: “the incarnate Son of God was thus both an individual self and the new humanity” (DBWE 4:215). Not only does Bonhoeffer emphasise the humanity of Jesus, but he also gives weight to the fact that Jesus even existed as the new humanity. This aspect is essential because

Bonhoeffer believed that whatever Jesus did in his new humanity, he did on behalf of the new humanity, “which he bore in his body,” making Him the second Adam (human being) (see DBWE 4:215). Jesus Christ, the second human being (Adam), created this new humanity. He (Jesus) is the “new human being.”

Bonhoeffer believed that it is only from the perspective, as mentioned above, that we will be able to understand the nature of the bodily community (DBWE 4:215). Bonhoeffer stresses that everything is summed up in this:

Christ is ‘for us,’ not only in his word and his attitude toward us, but in his bodily life. Christ stands bodily before God in the place that should be ours. The body of Jesus Christ is identical with the new humanity which he has assumed. The body of Christ is the church community [*Gemeinde*]. Jesus Christ at the same time is himself and his church community (DBWE 4:217).

The above explains the cogency that exists between Jesus Christ and the church community, which becomes synonymous with the idea that the incarnate Son of God is both an individual self and a new humanity. Whatever Christ did as his self and what he bore in his body, was at the same time, done for the benefit of the new humanity. The new humanity is representative of Christ’s church community for whom He died. Bonhoeffer affirms that “the body of Christ is the church community [*Gemeinde*]. Jesus Christ, at the same time, is himself and his church community” (see DBWE 4:217).

Bonhoeffer continues to develop his understanding of the ‘body of Christ as a community’ by relating the idea of community to the concept of the ‘vicarious representative action’ of Christ. I mentioned in Section Three in this chapter that in *Discipleship*, the design of the ‘vicarious representative action’ provided Bonhoeffer with all ‘the Christocentric foundation for all associations’, and in this instance, he uses ‘vicarious representative action’ to associate a community with the body of Christ. Bonhoeffer explains this association as follows:

The earthly body of Jesus is crucified and dies ... all our infirmities and sins and all our sin he bears on the cross ... and his earthly body dies only to rise again ... it is the same body and yet a new body ... there is no community with Jesus Christ other than the community with his body (DBWE 4:215f).

In the *Christology* lectures, the association between the body of Christ and the community is shown to come into existence through the word of proclamation. It also comes through the

symbolic nature of the sacraments that make it possible for individuals to be incorporated into the community of faith. The community of faith is the place where the body of Christ becomes the church community when we share His body in the community. Bonhoeffer says:

We share in the community of the body of Christ through the two sacraments of his body, that is baptism and the Lord's Supper ... the sacraments have their origin and goal in the body of Christ. Sacraments exist only because there is a body of Christ. There they begin and there they end (DBWE 4:216).

This is how the new humanity, the church community, has communion with His body.

Feil (1985:81) suggests that when Bonhoeffer speaks of the church, the community of faith, in *Discipleship*, he does so in a "Christocentric context; and the sacramental nature of the church is the consequence of the incarnation." The idea of the sacrament of Christ's body in the Lord's Supper is comprehensively developed in the *Christology* lectures. This presents us with evidence that continuity existed in Bonhoeffer's earlier and later writings, particularly in his *Christology* and theology.

Bonhoeffer agreed that "we receive the community of the body of Christ in the same way the disciples and the followers of Jesus received it in the early days, and this means that we are now 'with Christ' and 'in Christ,' and that 'Christ is in us'" (see DBWE 4:216). The aforementioned comes about as a consequence of the incarnation, and since Jesus bears the whole of human nature, we receive the community of the body of Christ. Bonhoeffer confirms, because of "the consequence of the incarnation we are with Christ" (Christ is Immanuel), and in effect "God is with us" (DBWE 4:217).

In sum, the God who became human was willing to dwell with us in the church community [*Gemeinde*]. The church community, God's church, the community of faith can only be built on God's self (meaning that God had to assume the form of humanity). In principle, Jesus assumed the form of God; thus, he existed as both human and divine.

In further discussing the church community, in Part Two, Bonhoeffer clarifies how the God who became human and dwells in the church community should be understood. To begin with, for Bonhoeffer, the "body of Christ" not the form of his body; instead, his earthly body should be recognised as Christ existing as a constitution of the "temple of God," as the church

community. Bonhoeffer explains that the actual temple is to be found in Jesus Christ because, in effect, Jesus applies the metaphor of the temple to his body. Subsequently, when Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered this reference. In effect, “the temple which the Jewish people expected is the body of Christ. The Jewish temple of the Old Testament is merely a shadow of the body of Christ,” and this all refers to Jesus, an indication that He is speaking of His human body (see DBWE 4:223). Bonhoeffer confirms that Jesus knew that his human body was temporary and would be destroyed, and to circumvent the entire loss of the house, the Son built another house. The church community of faith is that house in which the God who became human dwells among humanity, where He is present. Both of the following two aspects, Bonhoeffer stresses, have been fulfilled through Jesus Christ. First, the church community is “the place where God is truly and bodily present,”; and secondly, “it is here that humanity is truly and bodily present, for Christ has accepted humanity in his own body” (see DBWE 4:224). For Bonhoeffer, the aforementioned is a proper understanding of how the God who became human is present and dwells in the church community and should be understood. Bonhoeffer now shifts his assessment from the bodily presence of Christ in the community of faith to the two subsequent modes in which the presence of Christ can be displayed: as the visible community of faith; and as the audible community of faith. I will discuss these modes in sequence.

For Bonhoeffer, for the church to be actively visible as a community of faith, it needs to occupy space on this earth. In Bonhoeffer’s assessment, the body of Jesus Christ becomes apparent in the church community just as Jesus Christ’s physical body occupied space on this earth. In fact, “the God who became human entails the claim to space [being] granted on earth,” and as “our human eyes see the body of Jesus, faith knows him as the body of God incarnate” (see DBWE 4:225). This claim to space is about the humanness of Jesus Christ, about which Bonhoeffer says: “Here is God”⁵⁸ (see DBWE 4:225). Bonhoeffer reminds the church that Jesus Christ’s

⁵⁸ This reference is also found in the Christology (DBWE 12:318) with reference to God’s Word: God’s Word, Jesus Christ, as the Word of God that has taken human form, is the Word of God that has humbled itself by entering into the human world. That is why Luther says, “this is the human being to whom you should point and say, this is God”, in reference to Luther’s *De captivitate Babylonia*.

“claim to space” and the change in the physical assessment of Jesus Christ in the church community calls for a change in the community’s perception; a difference in their understanding as to their “claim to space” in the world and not to remain hidden (see DBWE 4:226). Bonhoeffer maintains that, if the church takes hold of their “claim to space” in the world, then the church would precisely understand that “the incarnate Son of God needs not only ears or even hearts; he needs actual, living human beings who follow him bodily” (see DBWE 4:226). For Bonhoeffer, this command meant that the disciples of Jesus Christ understood that the call to discipleship demands the community of faith to become the visible, bodily community, taking the form in the church community by claiming their space in the world (see DBWE 4:226).

Interrelated to the idea of the visible community of faith, is the sense of an audible community of faith, which Bonhoeffer believes are inextricably linked. Bonhoeffer asserts that the church community should also become audible through the proclamation of the logos. The church community should become the voice of the God who became human. Like the apostles became God’s witness of the bodily revelation of Jesus, so too the church community is “now compelled to bear witness to nothing else but the fact that God’s Word has become flesh. This same Word now comes to the church community” (see DBWE 4:228).

For Bonhoeffer, the church community of Jesus Christ should presently stand avowed within their rightful place, i.e., occupying a space in this world with a clear proclamation of ‘who’ the Christ is. Realising that Christ is the one who exists in bodily form in their community should compel the church community to make Christ both visible and audible in the world (see DBWE 4:232). Bonhoeffer asserts that the church needs to bear witness to the bodiliness of Christ and also to the human nature of Christ. The emphasis is on God who became human and is displayed by the visible and audible community of faith present as Christ. Very likely, Bonhoeffer remained concerned whether the proclamation of the church would be sufficient to “describe the visible form of the community of the body of Christ, or whether this community [would claim] yet another space in the world” (see DBWE 4:232). In *Discipleship*, we can detect Bonhoeffer’s concern regarding whether the church’s proclamation of ‘who’ the Christ

is was sufficient. Bonhoeffer was also intensely concerned about the church's intolerance toward Scripture and their tolerance of injustices committed by the Nazi regime, as he regularly witnessed while being in Finkenwalde.

The concrete witness of the church becomes an essential aspect of Bonhoeffer's conviction since he believed that the disciple of Christ should hold a living space on earth as the church community. Bonhoeffer also held that the New Testament had countless examples where the church community occupied an essential status on earth. Therefore, the present church should also claim a space on earth. The editors to *Discipleship* purport that,

... that is why [Bonhoeffer presumed] we must now speak of the living space [*Lebensraum*] of the visible church community ... this community is a living witness to the bodily humanity of the Son of God (DBWE 4:232).⁵⁹

Admittedly, for Bonhoeffer, the visible and audible community of faith always needs to be an expression of the God who became human, an illustration of a living witness to the divinity and humanity of Jesus, the Son of God.

Having explained the concepts of the bodily presence of the church community; the visible church community as a living witness; the church community being audible by claiming a space in the world, and the church community's proclamation of the bodiliness of God Bonhoeffer directs his attention to explaining God's real intent for Christians.

According to Bonhoeffer, God's actual intent for the church community is this: First, the disciple needs to understand that whatever status they hold in the world,

... they are to remain in the world solely for the sake of the body of Christ who became human [the God who became] for the sake of the church community ... and they are to remain in the world in order to engage the world in a frontal assault (DBWE 4:244).

On the other hand, the only way the disciple can engage the world tangibly is if the disciple

⁵⁹ The editorial notes in DBWE 4:232 suggest that Bonhoeffer refers to a subject 'Incarnation' found in his *Nachlaß* and in DBWE 14:460 – in which Bonhoeffer maintains that the space the church community occupies “includes the whole person in all areas of life and throughout all relationships. The reason for this is to be found in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Since he became completely human in all relationships of life, he has a rightful claim on the human being as a whole. Christ's call to follow him is addressed to the entire person. Whoever seeks to belong to his church community must totally belong to him. This space, which has its foundation in the presence of the incarnate Christ, is defined and delimited by the commandments. The proclamation of the whole incarnate Christ on one side, and the commandments on the other, are the perimeters within which the Christian lives”.

appropriates the concreteness of the revelation of Jesus in the disciple's life. Similarly, the only way the church community can engage the world tangibly is if the church community appropriates the concreteness of the revelation of Jesus in the church's life. It becomes both the disciple and the church's responsibility to allow the God who became human, the incarnate One, to take form in their lives.

Bonhoeffer implies that embracing and knowing the incarnate One not only means that we will tangibly and audibly engage the world; but that we would also recognise the One who took form in our lives both individually and corporately. If we embrace discipleship, it cannot be traded for 'cheap grace.' Discipleship means embracing a 'costly grace,' a grace that came about through the sacrifice of the incarnation of *God* and was given by *God* – the representative Christ who in person was also divine. Also, discipleship is about making it a goal to live and be holy and righteous before God. These goals come about and become attainable if the disciple understands that grace was costly because it cost God the life of His Son. Bonhoeffer asserts:

It comes about by *God* becoming flesh. In *God's* son ... *God* assumes our flesh ... carries our human flesh into death on the cross. *God* kills the Son of *God* ... [and] supplied the terrible proof of divine righteousness (DBWE 4:255).

In reality, what the Son has not given was given by *God*; *God* always has to be mediatory; meaning that being a disciple becomes a complete attachment to God. Bonhoeffer explains that

... the death of Jesus Christ is the place where *God's* righteousness dwells ... [and] whoever participates in this death participates in *God's* righteousness ... but now Christ has assumed our flesh, and in His body borne our sin on the cross⁶⁰ (DBWE 4:255).

It is through *God's* righteousness that we come to know the incarnate One as the 'body of God incarnate' that becomes the visible body and also taking on the form of the church community. In effect, the visible body of the church community is the representative of the divine and human attachment of Jesus Christ to the church community.

Nor does God stop working in the church community. The church community remains in the world to engage the world until God has changed the world into Christ's image. By extension, the goal of the church community is to be shaped into the form of the incarnate, Jesus Christ,

⁶⁰ This is 'costly grace', a grace that the church community needs to embrace.

and then only is the church community able to engage the world and shape the world into the image of Christ.

It is equally essential to Bonhoeffer that the church community bears witness to the image of the firstborn, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, as brothers and sisters. Bonhoeffer stresses that the ultimate goal for the church community is to become “like Christ”; that is what disciples are ultimately destined to become (see DBWE 4:281). If this is true, that the ultimate goal is to become “like Christ,” then how is it possible for human beings to be transformed into the image of God? Bonhoeffer’s solution to this question is undemanding. God has already taken care of this, “since fallen human beings cannot recover and assume the form of God, there is only one way to find help,” only the God who assumed humanity and took the form of humanity can help us (see DBWE 4:283). After all, Bonhoeffer claims:

Changing one’s form, is something which was not possible for human beings to do, it now takes place within God. God’s own image, which had remained with God through eternity, now assumes the image of the fallen, sinful human being. God send the divine Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:2f) (DBWE 4:283).

In the above quotation, Bonhoeffer references the different forms God assumes in His humanity, thereby confirming his continued adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ. The following extracts from the above quotation regarding God changing His form I will explain as follows. In examining Bonhoeffer’s expression, “God’s image, which had remained with God through eternity,” I take to refer to Jesus’ existence with God in eternity, which in turn makes Jesus divine (see DBWE 4:283). Also, Bonhoeffer’s expression, “[Jesus] assumes the image of the fallen, sinful human being,” expresses God’s becoming flesh, which then makes Jesus human (DBWE 4:283). The final expression “and He remained God” explains the ‘two natures’ of Christ, who exists as both human and divine; that is, He was human, yet He remained God (see DBWE 4:283).

Bonhoeffer stresses that God had to change His form by taking on the form of humanity. Since humanity cannot assume the form of God, it becomes possible in the church community to assume the form of Christ who took on the form of God and exists in the image of God. The ultimate goal for the church community is to become like Christ. For Bonhoeffer, that is what

disciples are ultimately destined to become. To this end, disciples have to be shaped into the form of the Incarnate, which Bonhoeffer says had been impossible for humans to achieve (see DBWE 4:284).

Consequently, this transformation now takes place with God. In fact, for Bonhoeffer, nothing else could suffice to accomplish the ultimate goal to ‘become like Christ,’ be transformed into the image of God, and to be shaped into the form of the Incarnate. Therefore, for this purpose, Jesus Christ, the human, took on our form as a human to ‘taste’ our humaneness and allow humans to achieve the ultimate goal. To this end, Bonhoeffer stresses:

In Jesus Christ, God’s own image has to come into our midst in the form of our lost human life, in the likeness of sinful flesh. In Jesus God created anew the divine image on earth. The incarnation, Jesus’ word and deed, are integral elements of this image (DBWE 4:284-285).

At the beginning of this section, I observed that the starting point for Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Discipleship* is almost always the incarnation. The most striking similarity to emerge in the last chapter of *Discipleship*, on the Image of Christ (DBWE 4:281-288), is in no way different; Bonhoeffer epitomises the incarnation by drawing on several phrases and symbols. The most prominent phrase that resonates throughout the last chapter is the Greek phrase *der Menschgewordenen*, the incarnate One, alternatively, the God who became human. To emphasise Christ’s humanity, I will include the German phrase *der Menschgewordene* with the personal pronoun Christ in my explanations as follows.

To establish the basis for understanding the incarnation with the “image of Christ,” Bonhoeffer suggests that it was always God’s intention to create His divine image in us through Adam (‘human being’ *Grk.*). However, because of the failure of Adam to maintain that relationship, God sends a human being to come to us humans – God sends His Son.

In Chapter Thirteen of *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer paints the following images of Christ – predominantly the human aspect of His nature. In the first place, Christ *der Menschgewordene* “places Himself in the midst of a world filled with sin and death.” After that, Christ *der Menschgewordene* “takes on the needs of human flesh,” and Christ *der Menschgewordene* “humbly submits to God’s wrath and judgement over sinners.” Immediately following, Christ

der Menschgewordene “remains obedient in suffering and death.” In turn, as it relates to his position in life, Christ *der Menschgewordene* “is born into poverty.” Lastly, the Christ *der Menschgewordene* “sat and ate with tax collectors and sinners” (see DBWE 4:284).

Interestingly, all these images portray God in human form and compile a complete representation of Jesus, who was willing to take on this form, being God in human form. It is the image of Christ *der Menschgewordene* who, on the cross, was rejected by God and human beings, and despite this, “this is God in human form; this is the human being who is the new image of God” (see DBWE 4:284). Whoever seeks to bear these images, the image of the human being who is the new image of God, Bonhoeffer asserts:

... must first have borne the image of the crucified one, defiled in the world [by understanding that] no one is able to recover the lost image of God unless they come to participate in the image of Christ *der menschgeworden* and crucified Christ (DBWE 4:284).

By extension, these images allow Bonhoeffer to emphasise the importance of the disciples’ goal to strive continually “to be shaped into the entire form of the incarnate One” because Christ *der Menschgewordene* took on our human form and became like us (see DBWE 4:285). We must be able to “in His humanity and lowliness, recognise our form. He became like human beings so that we would be like Christ *der Menschgewordene*” (see DBWE 4:285). Therefore, “in Christ *der Menschgewordene* all of humanity regains the dignity of bearing the image of God”; in fact, it is in community with Christ *der Menschgewordene* that we have once again regained our true humanity (see DBWE 4:285).

Subsequently, in the last chapter of *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer stresses that Christians, those who bear the image of Christ, may first be assured of a safe place within the church community. More precisely, Christians should understand that it is within the church community, with Christ, *der Menschgewordene*, that we are once again given our true humanity. Most of all, “inasmuch as we participate in Christ, *der Menschgewordene*, we also have a part in all of humanity, which is borne by him” (see DBWE 4:285). The implications of being “borne by him,” Bonhoeffer observes, are limitless. First, because Christ *der Menschgewordene* “transformed his disciples into brothers and sisters of all human beings” (DBWE 4:285), and

subsequently because Christ did the former, He expects Christians to show kindness. The same compassion that God revealed to the disciples through Christ must become evident in the Christian's life. Bonhoeffer concludes that the incarnation of Christ “is the reason for Christians to love every human being on earth as brother and sister” (DBWE 4:285). It follows then, Bonhoeffer affirms, that,

[Christ *der Menschgewordene* transformed the] church community into the body of Christ upon which all of humanity's sin and troubles fall, and by which alone these troubles and sins [are] borne by him (DBWE 4:285).

The above quotation recapitulates Bonhoeffer's idea of Christ's vicarious representation. Bonhoeffer frequently reminds the church community in *Discipleship* that it becomes inevitable for a disciple of Christ *der Menschgewordene* to suffer the same sufferings which Christ endured bodily. We learned in Chapter Four that this theme of Christ's vicarious representation is explained in *Sanctorum Communio*, which implies that there is continuity in Bonhoeffer's Christology and theology that he now develops further in *Discipleship*. Besides, Bonhoeffer understood that for the disciple of Christ *der Menschgewordene* it becomes inevitable to become like Christ *der Menschgewordene*. Christians need to be transformed into the image of Christ to remain in the church community to become like the glorified and risen one. Bonhoeffer stresses:

This transformation into the divine image will become ever more profound, and the image of Christ in us will continue to increase in clarity. This is the indwelling of Jesus Christ in our hearts. The life of Jesus Christ here on earth has not yet concluded. Christ [incarnate] continues to live ... in the lives of his followers (DBWE 4:286).

Since it is essential for the church community to be transformed into His image and to continue the life of Christ, Bonhoeffer finds it necessary to emphasise the following aspects in *Discipleship*. First, he stresses that the transformed life can only be lived for Christ *der Menschgewordene*. In turn, the disciple needs to understand that Christ *der Menschgewordene* has entered into me and lives my life. Subsequently, since He came into my life Christ *der Menschgewordene* needs to become animated in my life; Simultaneously, Christ *der Menschgewordene* takes on form in individuals because they are members of his body, the church. In the end, “the church bears the incarnate form of Jesus Christ” (see DBWE 4:287).

Bonhoeffer's final words to Christians who bear the image of Christ *der Menschgewordene*,

and been transformed into the image of God, follows. Disciples “are called to be ‘imitators of God.’ The follower [*Nachfolger*] of Jesus is the imitator [*Nachahmer*] of God” (DBWE 4:288).

7.5 Concluding Remarks

It is interesting to note how Bonhoeffer integrates different ideas relating to Christ and discipleship in *Discipleship*, by bringing together four key concepts, viz., the Church community, the Incarnation (God’s Word that became flesh), Sacrament and Vicarious representation.

To begin with, for Bonhoeffer, the church community can only hear Christ’s call for discipleship within His community of faith, the church. In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer’s insights on discipleship and church community is carefully integrated as Bonhoeffer explains his understanding of discipleship and its relation to the way of being a disciple in the church community. It is often suggested that these ideas on church community that Bonhoeffer develops in *Discipleship* find their roots in his earlier writings, *Santum Communio* and *Act and Being*. I have frequently suggested in this chapter that if this presents us with continuity with his previous writings *Santum Communio*, and *Act and Being*. Bonhoeffer’s detailed exposition on ‘being a disciple in the church community’ becomes very important in *Discipleship* because it is within the church community that the disciples resonate with Christ *der Menschgewordene*.

Secondly, fundamentally crucial to the call of discipleship is the disciples’ relationship toward the Incarnation – for Bonhoeffer Christ is present in person and word. The idea that God’s ‘Word’ is present in the person of Christ is developed by Bonhoeffer to illustrate how it is possible to understand the appropriation of God’s ‘Word’ in the disciples.’ Bonhoeffer also systematically developed the idea that God’s ‘Word’ has to be displayed concretely in the community of faith in the *Christology* lectures, where he emphasises the concept of the form of Christ as ‘Word.’ In his ‘*pro-me*’ structure, Jesus Christ is present in His person to the church in ‘Word.’ This suggests that continuity exists in Bonhoeffer’s thought on the concept of ‘Word’ that he simply continues in *Discipleship*.

In the third place, Bonhoeffer deals concisely with the idea of the sacrament in *Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer stresses that Christ's call to discipleship can be heard only within the church community, and it is only within the church community that Jesus Christ calls the disciple through his word and sacrament. The idea of the sacrament that Bonhoeffer developed in detail in his *Christology* lectures is developed further in *Discipleship*. This again evidence of continuity between Bonhoeffer's earlier and later writings, especially as now as his Christology and theology are concerned. Bonhoeffer elucidates his views on the sacrament in both instances, in the *Christology* lectures, and *Discipleship*. In the *Christology* lectures, he elaborates on how Christ is present in the community of the church bodily through the sacraments and how Christ exists by nature as sacrament in the church. Alternatively, in *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer elaborates that Christians share in the community of the body of Christ through the sacrament of his body, that is the Lord's Supper and that we the community of faith receive the body of Christ in the same way that the followers of Jesus received it in the early days.

Lastly, the theme of Christ's *vicarious representative action* provides Bonhoeffer with the Christocentric foundation for all the associations he makes between the gospel presentation and the call to discipleship. This theme is also developed in *Sanctorum Communio* – further evidence of continuity in Bonhoeffer's writings.

Equally important to the four concepts discussed above is Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the present Christ in *Discipleship* and how the disciples of Christ should embrace His call. Bonhoeffer says that as Jesus walked with his disciples, he is present today in the church-present-community of faith through his word and sacrament; Jesus is bodily present in the community of faith.

Bonhoeffer's insistence on the humanity of Christ in *Discipleship* is expressed in the conviction that the body of Christ is established and confirmed in God who became human and who is wholly present in the community of faith. We will see that Bonhoeffer presents similar ideas already developed in *Discipleship* in his *Ethics*. Specifically, the term *der Menschgewordene* (the incarnate One) occurs frequently in the texts of both *Discipleship* and *Ethics*.

Chapter 8 Ethics

8.1 Introduction

Bonhoeffer's posthumous book *Ethics*, perceived as the culmination of his lifework, first published in German in 1949, appeared in English in various editions in 1955 and again in 1965. The latest 2005 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English-language translation presents a critical reconstruction of Bonhoeffer's uncompleted manuscripts. The editors affirm that although the German translation has been available since 1949, "only comparatively recently [have] detailed studies of the manuscripts in their own right begun in earnest" (DBWE 6:2). The latest edition of *Ethics* furnishes the reader with a resourceful introduction and an afterword that addresses many different subjects. These subjects include the following ethical themes found in the book. First, the development of Bonhoeffer's theology and Christology, which the editors deduce, is at the heart of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*. Second, Bonhoeffer's concern for Christian ethics in a time of peace and ethics in a time of tyrannicide and *coup d'état*, as well as the question of Bonhoeffer's pacifism. Thirdly, Bonhoeffer's expectations for post-war Germany, and his proposal to reconstruct Lutheran thinking in different aspects of church and society (see DBWE 6:2). The editors affirm that the "distinctive characteristic" of the latest edition is "introduced in relation to the previous German and English editions of the book" (DBWE 6:2). The greatest challenge in piecing together the uncompleted manuscripts was that the chronological order of composition might have differed significantly from the order in which Bonhoeffer intended they be presented and read.⁶¹

In place of those as mentioned above, I will explain Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Ethics* by following the primary manuscripts, as outlined in the latest 2005 edition, and number them in sequence under the headings. Christ, Reality and Good, Ethics as Formation. Heritage and Guilt, The concept of Heritage, The Concept of Guilt, Ultimate and Penultimate Things, History and Good [1], and History and Good [2]. In each manuscript, I will do an in-depth reading and analysis to enable me to trace Bonhoeffer's Christology in the book. Three

⁶¹ For further reading on the reconstruction of the manuscripts cf. pages 25-34 of Clifford J. Green's, 'Editor's Introduction to the English Edition,' in DBWE 6 (2005).

distinguishing characteristics come to the fore in *Ethics*: Bonhoeffer's usage of the word *Menschwerdung*; political realities that influenced his involvement in the *Abwehr*; and the Christocentric framework of *Ethics*. What follows is a concise discussion of these three characteristics.

In *Ethics*, the word *Menschwerdung* is essential in relation to Bonhoeffer's Christology as the word appears throughout the book. In Chapter 6, I mentioned that there is always a distinct difference in Bonhoeffer's usage of the words *Menschgewordene* and *Menschwerdung*. *Menschwerdung* is used in the context of revelation, and *Menschgewordene* in the meaning of the sacrament and the cross. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer prefers *Menschwerdung* above *Menschgeworden*. I intend to determine how Bonhoeffer employs *Menschwerdung* in *Ethics*; and how it interrelates to the theology of ethics, particularly his Christology. Coupled to the word *Menschwerdung* is the idea of 'mensch,' namely, the idea of 'human being' as distinct from 'man' that gains momentum in *Ethics*, specifically that 'God becomes a human being.' The editors propose that this phrase, "'God becoming a human being,' recurs throughout the manuscripts like a litany."⁶² In fact, in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer does not use the word "incarnation"⁶³ because he seems more concerned about Jesus' humanity as God-human.

Ethics reflects the first phase in the development of how Bonhoeffer understood political realities that were sharpened by his involvement in the *Abwehr*. An experience without which he would indeed never have declared so emphatically that "the knowledge of good and evil appears to be the goal of all ethical reflection; hereafter, the first task of Christian ethics is to supersede that knowledge" (see DBWE 6:299).

It becomes clear upon reading *Ethics* that Bonhoeffer deeply cements most of his ideas, in the manuscripts, within a Christocentric framework. First, Bonhoeffer stresses the relationship of God to the world, which can only be appropriated through Christ. Second, Bonhoeffer repeatedly brings to the fore that the reality of God is only understood in relation to Christ –

⁶² For further reading see the Editors Introduction to Bonhoeffer's Christological Center of *Ethics* (critical edition, Bonhoeffer 2009 DBWE 6:6-9).

⁶³ On two or three occasions either because Bonhoeffer writes more theoretically or because of concern for English writing style, *Menschwerdung* is translated 'incarnation' (see Editor's note [20] DBWE 6:6).

Christ is God's reality. Third, Bonhoeffer continually pronounces God's self-revealing and salvific nature. Last, Bonhoeffer characterises – how God entered into the lives of human beings (as a human) and took upon Himself, to carry in the flesh, the nature, character, guilt, and suffering of humanity. My study of Ethics aims to determine whether the composition of the manuscripts is indeed Christocentric.

The above characteristics in Bonhoeffer's Christology deserve further attention because they recur in the other Bonhoeffer manuscripts and seem to lie at the heart of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*.

8.2 Christ and Reality in *Ethics*

At the onset of this manuscript, Bonhoeffer is resolved on clarifying that human good (ethics) is embedded in the idea of God's reality, which for Bonhoeffer necessitates an accurate perception that the existence of God is not merely a religious concept. On the contrary, God is the ultimate reality as the self-announcing, self-witnessing, self-revealing God in Christ. The question of good can only find its answer in Christ if He indeed is seen as God's reality (see DBWE 6:48,49). Bonhoeffer stresses that one needs to be concerned with is the reality of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The reality of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ, Bonhoeffer stresses, is the ultimate reality of God who becomes God's 'self-witness,' and 'God's self-revelation,' by becoming a human being (*mensch*).

For Bonhoeffer, the subject matter of Christian ethics becomes the reality of God revealed in Jesus Christ becoming real [*Wirklichwerden*] among God's creatures (see DBWE 6:48-49). Christ is God's reality; the concrete sum of God's self-revelation. This concept, 'God's self-revelation'⁶⁴ through Christ, is not unknown in Bonhoeffer's corpus. I maintain that the reality of God ('God's self-revelation') revealed in Jesus Christ's becoming real [*Wirklichwerden*] among humans is a prominent idea developed in his earlier writings, *Sanctorum Communio*, *Act and Being*, *Christology* and *Discipleship*.

In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer emphasises the idea of 'God's self-revelation' in the following ways: For Bonhoeffer, any reality or theology of revelation begins with the church

⁶⁴ This concept is synonymous with the idea of the ultimate reality of the 'self-witness' of God.

and God; subsequently, Bonhoeffer asserts that,

... every aspect [of reality] is imparted through revelation [and] though the essence of the human being, of nature, or of [broken] history in general terms, [must be put] only in the context of revelation that has been heard (DBWE 1:60-61).

Primarily, in Chapter 4, the overall theme in *Sanctorum Communio* is the conception of the church as empirically being ‘God’s self-revelation’ through Christ in the church. The reality of the church of Christ is given in ‘God’s self-revelation’ in Christ.

In Chapter 5 of *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer deals with the expression, ‘God’s self-revelation’ in several ways. Bonhoeffer asserts that ‘God’s self-revelation’ should be understood as an engagement against the philosophical understanding of ‘God’s self-revelation.’ Equally important, the revelation should be understood as an assertion of ‘God’s self-revelation’ that is resolved only in Christ; namely, Christ (God revealed) exists in the church as community.

In Chapter 6 of the *Christology* lectures, Bonhoeffer places ‘God’s self-revelation’ within the context of the active Word of God. He explains that the emphasis placed on “Christ as the Word of God in the sense of a spoken word” means that God’s active Word presents itself “as truth breaking into a concrete moment, and as if God is speaking to us” through revelation (see DBWE 12:316). To this end, God’s revelation of Christ (the Word of God) at the right time, through God’s determination, “expresses both the contingent character of Christ’s revelation and his commitment to humankind” (see DBWE 12:317). In *Christology*, Bonhoeffer often implies that Christ becomes God’s active Word spoken to me, *pro-me*.

In Chapter 7 in *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer stresses that the only way the disciple or church community can engage the world is by appropriating the concreteness of the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth. Bonhoeffer emphasises that the concreteness of revelation in discipleship takes place in both the church and in the disciples’ life, specifically, when the God who became human has to take form in the new community’s life.

Garnering from the above, one can presume that Bonhoeffer developed the idea of ‘God’s self-revelation’ in his earlier writings; and that he unfolds the concept of ‘revelation’ in different contexts in each book. In *Ethics* Bonhoeffer unfolds the idea of ‘God’s self-revelation’ in Jesus

Christ becoming real [*Wirklichwerden*] in the context of the ‘reality of God revealed in Jesus Christ,’ Christ as ‘God’s self-witness,’ and as ‘God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ’ (see DBWE 1:106).

On the whole, Bonhoeffer’s idea of ‘God’s self-revelation’ and every other aspect of God’s revelation is found in the church, that is, the church affirms the revelation of God in Christ. In his earlier writings, Bonhoeffer assumed that “the church is grounded in the revelation of the heart of God” (see DBWE 1:106). Bonhoeffer understood revelation in relation to the church where God is ‘seen’ and ‘heard’ through ‘God’s self-revelation’ in Christ only in the church community. Christ is God’s reality in the church community. These ideas of ‘God’s self-revelation’ (by becoming *mensch* through Christ), and by displaying Godself in the church community’ through both the human and divine natures of Christ; are ideas that Bonhoeffer will continue to develop and employ in *Ethics*. Complementary to the notion of ‘God’s self-revelation’ of himself in this manuscript, Bonhoeffer develops the idea of ‘Jesus Christ as the reality of God’ that he associates with Christian ethics. He explains:

Christian ethics speaks otherwise of the reality that is the origin of the good. It means thereby the reality of God as the ultimate reality beyond and in all that exists and the reality of the existing world. In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of this world (DBWE 6:54).

With God’s entry into the reality of this world, Bonhoeffer deemed humans were implicitly invited to participate in the reality of God and of the world. One cannot exist without the other.

Bonhoeffer acknowledges:

I find the reality of the world already borne, accepted and reconciled in the reality of God ... that is the mystery of the revelation of God in the human being Jesus Christ (DBWE 6:55).

Bonhoeffer insists that Christian ethics should ask the following question: How can this be possible for Christ to become real in our world? He answers the question by developing the idea of ‘Jesus Christ as the reality of God’ to being realised in the church. Leahy suggests that,

Ethics delve[s] right into [Bonhoeffer’s] Christocentric ecclesiology, focused on the notion of reality that becomes manifest in the Church ... this reality [is] revealed by Christ and realized in being Church (Leahy 2008:48,49).

What matters more to Bonhoeffer is the question of how the reality of Christ is to be lived out.

He responds:

Rather the question is how the reality in Christ – which has long embraced us and our world within itself – works here and now or, in other words, how life is to be lived in it. What matters is *participating in the reality of God and the world in Jesus Christ today*, and doing so in such a way that I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world, nor the reality of the world without the reality of God (DBWE 6:55).

In the Afterword, to *Ethics* the editors affirm that the above is Bonhoeffer's point of departure regarding concrete ethics in this manuscript and is "the theological question of how the reality of God revealed in Jesus Christ can take form in human life in the world" (see DBWE 6:409).

The first manuscript expresses Bonhoeffer's contention that God's reality is the ultimate reality realised in Jesus Christ. Scholarship on this issue includes Charles Marsh, who traces the development of Bonhoeffer's understanding of the reality of God in his writings, and who suggests:

Bonhoeffer connects the assumption of God in [human] form viz., in the body of Jesus Christ God is united with humanity; the whole of humanity is accepted by God. The Incarnation of the Word in suffering flesh makes it hereafter impossible to speak of the world as estranged by God. God in Christ becomes this Reality (Marsh 1992b:443).

More precisely, for Marsh, any question about the reality of God and the world should be founded and personified only by the name Jesus Christ. Everything is enclosed in this name. Marsh concludes that Bonhoeffer stands on this conviction that the reality of is only imparted through Jesus Christ (both as human and divine); Christ becomes God's reality of revelation (see Marsh 1994:103). Subsequently, for Marsh, the idea "Christ becomes God's reality of revelation" becomes Bonhoeffer's way of expressing "God as the ultimate reality" (see Marsh 1994:103). Marsh explains:

[God] exists as no other than the one who shows forth, manifests and reveals himself as Jesus Christ the reality of God who entered the reality of the world, as a result of which the reality of God and the reality of the world are explicated by the name Jesus Christ. Beyond this name there is no appeal, neither to self-reflexive subjectivity nor to some mystical insight (Marsh 1994:103).

In this manuscript, Bonhoeffer is resolute in affirming the reality of God. For Bonhoeffer Ultimate, reality can only be found in God's self-witness; besides, reality is about 'God's self-revelation' as manifested in God becoming *mensch*; and ultimately the reality of God can only be revealed in Jesus Christ. If examined in these ways, one could determine that these

expressions are clear indications that Bonhoeffer never departed from his adherence to the Chalcedonian Definition; because in *Ethics*, the reality of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ is the only thing with which we need to be concerned. In truth, both human and divine meet in the revelation of Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ is the reality of God.

Ulrik Nissen writes prolifically about Bonhoeffer's ideas on reality and concentrates on the Chalcedonian aspect of Bonhoeffer's understanding of reality. In this regard, Nissen argues for a Chalcedonian position. He suggests that Bonhoeffer's understanding of the Christ-reality implied that Bonhoeffer could not follow the traditional separations that were so common in contemporary Christian ethics. Nissen supposed that,

Bonhoeffer [did] not believe the reality of God and the reality of the world are in opposition. However, at the same time [Bonhoeffer did] not give up on the differentiation between these concepts of reality (Nissen 2011:326).

For Bonhoeffer, "all concepts of reality that ignore Jesus Christ are abstractions ... and in Christ, we are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of the world" (see DBWE 6:54f). Bonhoeffer held that the reality of God and that of the world were not separate. Still, they should be kept together in what he calls "a polemical unity," a separated unity where differences are maintained and yet not separated (see Nissen 2011:326). For Nissen Bonhoeffer's "analogy to the Chalcedonian Christology becomes quite clear here," where reality is "accepted and reconciled in the reality of God, that is, the mystery of the revelation of God in the human being Jesus Christ" (see Nissen 2011:326 and DBWE 6:54,45,55). Nissen maintains:

The Chalcedonian Christology implies for Bonhoeffer that he can argue for the difference between and the unity of the nature of God and the human being at one and the same time. In Christ the two natures are one, yet differentiated (Nissen 2006:99).

Nissen argues that the Chalcedonian Christology is central in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, particularly in being able to differentiate between the reality of God in Christ and Christ's reality to the world.

Bonhoeffer's understanding of reality sets the stage for defining further characteristics of reality (*Wirklichkeit*). Nissen maintains that "reality is an essential concept for [Bonhoeffer's] ethics and a concept fundamentally shaped by the Christological understanding underlying the

entirety of his work [*Ethics*] ... and Bonhoeffer's understanding of reality is shaped by a Chalcedonian Christology" (see Nissen 2011:324). Nissen assumes that those as mentioned above, then becomes Bonhoeffer's Christological approach to reality. He stresses that,

For Bonhoeffer, the Christ-reality is a differentiated unity of the reality of God and the reality of the world. Neither is understood separate from the other or identified with the other. Rather, it is an appreciation and affirmation of both realities in the same reality at the same time (Nissen 2011:325).

There is only one realm of Christ-reality [*Christuswirklichkeit*] in which the reality of God and that of the world are united; as a result, Bonhoeffer rejects the idea of two realities (see Nissen 2006:100). To reduce the risk of developing another approach to reality, Bonhoeffer makes clear that no reality can exist outside the reality of Christ. He affirms: "there are not two realities, but only one reality, that is, God's reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world" (see DBWE 6:58).

Why does the idea of 'one reality' become so crucial for Bonhoeffer to explain? The reason if understood correctly, the idea of 'one reality' will be embraced as the reality of Christ, and "the whole reality of the world will be drawn into and held together" as the reality of Christ (see DBWE 6:58). Hence, Bonhoeffer asserts:

The world has no reality of its own independent of God's revelation in Christ – there are not two realms, but only the one realm of the Christ-reality [*Christuswirklichkeit*]. The reality of God and the reality of the world are united (DBWE 6:58).

The translators of *Ethics* pay particular attention to this statement, "the one realm [not two realms] of the Christ-reality." They propose that the deleted phrase "He is the very source of all knowledge of all reality" is related to "the reality of God that is in Christ" (see DBWE 6:55).

They propose that,

In the preceding sentence ['He is the very source of all knowledge of all reality'] is formulated the basic configuration of Bonhoeffer's Christological theology: the mutual reference of this reality of God and the world, which encounter each other in Christ, 'the one without the other' (DBWE 6:55).

For Bonhoeffer by being "in Christ we are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of the world at the same time, the one not without the other"; to be exact, Christ and the world cannot be conceived as two realms (see DBWE 6:55, 58).

In discussing Bonhoeffer's rejection of two-sphere thinking, Burtness (1985:37) suggests that

the phrase “the reality of God and in the reality of the world” in *Ethics* clearly expresses Bonhoeffer’s incarnational theology; and what Bonhoeffer’s ethical theology is all about. Burtness agrees that Bonhoeffer employs a “Christological theology” in *Ethics*, postulating that,

[Bonhoeffer’s] rejection of two-sphere thinking is at the heart of Bonhoeffer’s ethical theology. He rejects two sphere thinking because he believes it to be directly contrary to the central Christian affirmation that God and the world come together in Jesus Christ (Burtness 1985:37).

Bonhoeffer’s rejection of the two-sphere thinking allowed him to place Christ at the centre of these realities, thereby extrapolating that the unity between the two exists only “in the Christ reality” (see DBWE 6:59). I maintain that since Bonhoeffer places Christ at the centre of these realities, and insists that Christ holds the place as the reality of God and the reality of the world simultaneously, that this allows him to formulate his incarnational theology, viz., the self-revelation of God by becoming *mensch*. Bonhoeffer confirms this by saying:

Whoever confesses the reality of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God [by becoming *mensch*] confesses in the same breath the reality of God and the reality of the world, for they find God and the world reconciled in Christ [by becoming *mensch*] (DBWE 6:62).

Bonhoeffer shifts his attention in this manuscript to another characteristic of the ‘reality of Christ’ (*Christuswirklichkeit*) concerning the ‘reality of the world,’ which he relates to the idea of ‘spatiality.’ Bonhoeffer understood and endorsed the concept of the ‘reality of Christ’ in the following ways: the ‘reality of Christ’ is representative of the absolute ‘reality of Christ’ as God’s self-revelation; the ‘reality of Christ’ in relation to the ‘reality of the world’ is representative of ‘static oppositions’; the two cannot co-exist, and the ‘reality of Christ’ in relation to the ‘reality of the world’ necessitates a definite need for them to be separated from each other; they occupy different spaces.

This then brings us to Bonhoeffer’s idea of ‘spatiality,’ which is not an unrelated idea. Bonhoeffer clearly understood that ‘spatiality’ existed within the New Testament narrative wherein the church is described as occupying space in the world as the “visible church community of God on earth” (see DBWE 6:62). Bonhoeffer stresses that these “spatial images cannot be avoided”; because the “visible church community of God on earth” and “spatial images” denote the idea of God’s revelation in Christ who occupies “space” on earth (see

DBWE 6:62f). Christ is the reality of God's self-revelation, namely, the incarnation. Bonhoeffer warns that the church must not be confused as being the "second incarnation" of Christ.

On the contrary, "the space of the church is the place where witness is given to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ" (see DBWE 6:63). The idea of 'spatiality,' alternatively "occupying space," Bonhoeffer elaborates in detail in *Discipleship*, particularly with regards to the church occupying space as it exists as a community. The discussions on 'spatiality' in *Ethics* suggest continuity between Bonhoeffer's earlier and later writings.

At this juncture in this manuscript, Bonhoeffer redirects his discussion on 'spatiality' and the 'two-realm' dialogue to the question about the one (Christ) who became human (*mensch*). He notes that "the question is now whether we can replace it [the two-realm image] with another image that is simple and plausible" to stop endangering the understanding of the Christ who became human (*mensch*) (see DBWE 6:66). Bonhoeffer suggests that to circumvent any further dialogue on the 'two realms' image, "we must turn our eyes to the image of Jesus Christ's own body – the one who became human (*mensch*), was crucified and is risen" (see DBWE 6:66).

The idea of '*mensch*,' in particular the concept 'the one who became human,' is not new but is introduced in *Discipleship*, where it becomes the central theme of the closing chapter – suggesting continuity in Bonhoeffer's thought and theology. This phrase *der menschgewordene*, together with the personal pronoun Christ, emphasises Christ's humanity as the incarnate One. Alternatively, 'the God who became a human being' resonates throughout *Discipleship* (see DBWE 4:281-288). This similarity found in *Discipleship* and *Ethics* not only suggests continuity of thought, theology, and Christology but also validates Bonhoeffer's understanding of the Chalcedonian Definition; in this case, he places a strong emphasis on the humanity of Christ in both his *Discipleship* and *Ethics*. In all instances, when Bonhoeffer mentions Jesus Christ as the *mensch* in *Ethics*, this image is representative of Jesus' becoming visible in the church community; to be exact, the church community is the body of Jesus Christ. It is here in the church community that "God is united with humankind, and all humanity is accepted by God" through Jesus Christ, the God who became a human being (*mensch*) (see

DBWE 6:66).

Interrelated to the image of a *mensch* is Bonhoeffer's idea of the *divine mandates*⁶⁵ of the church, concerning the proclamation of the church *vis-à-vis* the reality of Jesus Christ by becoming *mensch*. Bonhoeffer stresses that this does not mean that when the New Testament merges the concept of the body of Christ with the church community that the church is first and foremost set apart from the world. On the contrary, for Bonhoeffer, in line with the New Testament, "statements about God becoming flesh in Christ expresses that in the body of Christ all humanity is accepted"; this leaves the church community with a responsibility to make this known to the world (see DBWE 6:67). Hence Christians are obligated to call the world "into the community [*Gemeinschaft*] of the body of Christ to which the world in truth already belongs" (see DBWE 6:67). Bonhoeffer stresses that the church needs to continue to exist as a community, which should be displayed in several ways: First, the church has to live as the concrete reality of God in its relation to the world as Christ is to the church. Bonhoeffer explains that this "divine mandate of the church is the commission of allowing the reality of Jesus Christ to become a real proclamation" (see DBWE 6:68). Second, the church community has to exist as the expression of the whole earthly and eternal reality that God in Jesus Christ has prepared for them (see DBWE 6:67).

Bonhoeffer sets a high standard and expectation for the church, for, in the church community, the reality of Jesus Christ has to become the real proclamation of who Jesus Christ is. He is the one who became human (*mensch*), the God who became a human being. Therefore, Christians are continually obligated to call the world into the community of the body of Christ. In effect, the world stands in relation to Christ, which becomes concrete in the *divine mandate*⁶⁶ of God in the church community. In turn, the world is called into the community of the body of Christ. Bonhoeffer now shifts his attention to another aspect of the *divine mandates*. Bonhoeffer conceives that the Christian mandates are internalised in the community-of-faith. More so, if it

⁶⁵ These mandates included work, marriage, government and church, which for Bonhoeffer were divine only because of their original and final relation to the Christ, who became human (*mensch*).

⁶⁶ The mandate becomes divine only because of its original and final relation to Christ in the church community.

is accepted – it will leave an effective community-of-faith in the world, i.e., the church which “allows the reality of Jesus Christ to become real in proclamation and Christian life” (see DBWE 6:70-73).

In uniting the idea of the *divine mandates* of God to humanity, Bonhoeffer associates divinity with human nature by suggesting:

The human person is not the place where the divine mandates show that they cannot be united. This happens, to be sure, in no other way than when people allow themselves to be placed through Jesus Christ before the completed reality of God’s becoming human (DBWE 6:73ff).

Bonhoeffer’s idea of the completed “reality of God’s becoming human” is his way of presenting an ‘incarnational’ Christology that he assumes should become the locus of the community-of-faith. Regarding the theology of “the reality of God’s becoming human,” Bonhoeffer states:

The doctrine of divine mandates serves to place human beings before the *one* and whole reality as we find it revealed in Jesus Christ. So here again everything finally flows into the reality of the body of Jesus Christ, in whom God and human beings became one (DBWE 6:74).

Thus far, I have maintained that Bonhoeffer perceived the church as the community-of-faith in two ways. First, the community becomes concrete as the *divine mandates* of God in the world; and to exist as the concrete reality of God in the world as Christ is to the church. Second, by allowing the reality of Jesus Christ to become the church’s real proclamation, that is, the reality of God’s becoming a human being (*mensch*).

Several scholars have explored the interrelationship between God’s *divine mandates* and the community-of-faith suggested by Bonhoeffer. In discussing the community-of-faith as being the ‘bearers’ of the *divine mandates* of God in the church, Weissbach suggests:

The bearers of the mandates [also have to act] as deputies⁶⁷ and as the bearers of the mandates [they] are authorized to engage in ethical discourse. This authority to act as deputies is based on the fact that the commandment comes down from above and is based on the condescension of God [the God who became human] in Christ and on the vicarious action of Christ (Weissbach 1967:143).

Weissbach concludes that as bearers of God’s *divine mandates*, Christians become

⁶⁷ In the latest 2005 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English-language translation the word ‘deputies’ is translated as ‘vicarious representatives’.

representatives of God in all areas of life. Decisively for Weissbach,

... according to Bonhoeffer the church's mission will always remain the same, that is to proclaim the incarnate (*mensch*) Christ – Christ existing in community always rings true in Bonhoeffer's Christology (Weissbach 1967:143).

Contrary to Weissbach, Feil postulates that Bonhoeffer's aspect of mandates as deputyship implies sociality. Feil suggests:

Because of Christ's deputyship [vicarious representative] humankind now receives new community in the incarnation. This takes up the aspect of sociality: the new humanity is constituted in Christ who at one and the same time is human being and humanity. Deputyship is one of the central characteristics of the life made possible by Jesus Christ (Feil 1985:86).

Taken together, both Weissbach's and Feil's explanations of Bonhoeffer's understanding of the *divine mandates* seem plausible. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer accentuates the social aspect of the church, that is, Christians live not only for themselves but for God (as *mensch*) and other humans. Subsequently, Bonhoeffer emphasises that life should be lived ethically and grounded in the reality of Christ; in particular, the reality of God's becoming a human being (*mensch*). Ultimately the life lived for other humans emanates from the proclamation of the reality of Christ in the world. The church community engages the world by calling the world into the community. Bonhoeffer expresses these ideas throughout his ethical theology, which he develops in the following manuscript; ethics becomes formation.

8.3 Ethics as Formation

The manuscript shows that Bonhoeffer's notion of 'ethics as formation' underpins his thoughts on the way that Christ's form takes shape in the world, particularly the reality of the world as reconciled with God in Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer formulates his ideas on 'formation' by first confirming the humanity of Jesus and then by showing how Jesus' humanity interrelates with Jesus' 'formation' in the world. For Bonhoeffer, any person who sees Jesus Christ "sees in fact God and the world in one" (see DBWE 6:82). It becomes impossible not to see God without the world, or the world without God. Subsequently, for Bonhoeffer, the God-human Jesus Christ comes between God and humans and become the reconciler who,

... steps into the centre of all that happens ... now there is no longer any reality, any world that is not reconciled with God and at peace. God has done this in the beloved son,

Jesus Christ. *Ecce homo!*'⁶⁸ *Ecce homo*—behold, God became human (DBWE 6:83f).

In sum, Bonhoeffer perceived that the reason why God had to become human was to embrace the whole of humanity for no other reason than to become human like us. Primarily for Bonhoeffer, the “unfathomable mystery of the love of God for the world” [by] establishing “a real intimate unity by becoming human, a real human being” (see DBWE 6:84). Bonhoeffer stresses that “this affirmation rests on an infinitely deeper one that God has taken on humanity bodily [by] overruling every uncertainty raised against God’s love by entering as a human being into human life. God becomes human out of love for humanity” (see DBWE 6:85).

This manuscript continually affirms his understanding and adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation regarding the humanity of God, viz.,

His manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation (Chalcedonian Definition 451).

This then becomes Bonhoeffer Christological concentration, namely that God became a human being (*mensch*).

Feil (1985:86) suggests that Bonhoeffer’s concentration on Christology in *Ethics* and his focus on Jesus Christ suggest “that the continuity of Bonhoeffer’s theology is particularly apparent [and] the concentration on Jesus can be found in all parts of *Ethics*” (see Feil 1985:86). Also, Feil suggests that the foundation of the subject ‘ethics as formation’ is Jesus Christ. Feil deduces that,

Bonhoeffer developed the Christological assertion, ‘*Ecce homo!*—Behold the man!’, in terms of the following exclamations: ‘Behold the God who has become human being’; ‘Behold the human being judged by God’; and ‘Behold the human being who was taken to Himself by God, sentenced and executed and awakened by God to a new life. Behold the Risen one’. Humans obtain the form which is essentially proper to them only from the form of Jesus Christ (Feil 1985:86f).

Equally crucial to Bonhoeffer’s Christological affirmation is the proclamation of the “message of God’s becoming human,” the effect thereof, and how understanding the message should

⁶⁸ *Homo* means ‘human being’. See Editor’s note [28] DWBE (2005), Text Deleted: “*Ecce homo*—behold the reconciler of the world, who is human like us. In this person lies the divine Yes to being human. God became human.” The foregoing replaced: “*Ecce homo*—behold in this person God become human. God embraces humanity.”

affect the heart of humanity (see DBWE 6:85). Bonhoeffer's concern is for the effectiveness of the message to bring about change in an age "when contempt for humanity or idolization of humanity is the height of all wisdom, success among bad people's proclamation as well as good" (see DBWE 6:85). In effect, Bonhoeffer asserts that, if faced with the message of God's becoming human, then,

... this contempt will stand the test no better than that of the tyrant. The despiser of humanity despises what God has loved, despises the very form of God become human ... Only because God became human is it possible to know and not despise real human beings (DBWE 6:87).

The only reason that God has "taken on humans" is because "God's love for human does not reside in them, but only in God"; therefore, God accepts humans despite the contempt shown to the message of God's becoming human. Bonhoeffer concludes that God's acceptance of humans is "grounded only in God's becoming human [and] in the unfathomable love of God for human beings" (see DBWE 6:87).

This then leads Bonhoeffer to the question: How is God's love related to the problem of God's becoming human? Bonhoeffer explains the interrelation as God's love, which caused God to execute judgement on Himself through Christ's death, and only because God did so "could peace grow between God and the world" (see DBWE 6:88). Bonhoeffer concludes that,

... the secret of this judgment, this suffering and this dying [of God], is the love of God for the world, for human beings ... in the figure of the crucified human beings recognize and find themselves ... to be judged and reconciled by God on the cross – that is the reality of humanity (DBWE 6:88).

In this manuscript, Bonhoeffer's Christological theology converges with his idea of how Christ takes form in the world. In this specific instance, Bonhoeffer stresses:

All formation is concerned only with the one form that has overcome the world, the form of Jesus Christ [and this] formation occurs only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ, by being conformed to the unique form of the one who became human, was crucified and risen (DBWE 6:93).

More precisely, for Bonhoeffer, "to be conformed to the one who has become human means that we may be the human beings that we really are," and intended to be formed, namely, into the image of Christ (see DBWE 6:94). Although these ideas can be propounded as being incarnational theology, I propose that these are inklings of Bonhoeffer's adherence to the

Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ, viz., “He is of the same reality as God as far as His deity is concerned and of the same reality as we ourselves as far as His humanness is concerned” (Chalcedon 451).

In this manuscript, Bonhoeffer emphasises the humanity of Christ. Christ is seen as the reconciler of the world, which is human-like us. Christ is seen as the reality of the God who became human in Jesus Christ, and through the God-human Jesus Christ, humanity became acceptable to God in the incarnation.

In his analysis of Bonhoeffer’s phrase, “being conformed to the unique form of the one who became human” Hegarty (1967:362) claims that “one of the central themes of *Ethics* is [Bonhoeffer’s] idea of the necessity of man ‘conforming’ with and in Jesus Christ” (see Hegarty 1967:362). He also speculates that,

Bonhoeffer reasoned that the effect which the incarnation has upon human reality is consequential to what ‘conforming’ means in the light of the reality of Jesus Christ in whom the reality of God and the reality of man exist in harmony (Hegarty 1967:362).

Hegarty’s assumption regarding the association between reality and the incarnation seems plausible because in *Ethics* Bonhoeffer repeatedly infers that the incarnation of Christ, God’s becoming human, and human reality are all interrelated – thereby underlining the importance of these concepts to Bonhoeffer. The realities that Bonhoeffer emphasises are the reality of God ‘in becoming human’; the reality of Jesus Christ as God’s reality; and the reality of humanity, which is invited to participate in the reality of God. Bonhoeffer believed that Christ empowered these realities, and therefore Christ is the basis for all reality. Bonhoeffer concludes that,

... Christ does not abolish human reality in favor of an idea that demands to be realized against all that is real. Christ empowers reality, affirming it as the real human being and thus the ground of all human reality (DBWE 6:99).

In sum, Bonhoeffer’s intent in this manuscript is to establish two things about formation: First, the form of Christ⁶⁹ is preserved “not as a general idea but as the unique One, the God who became human, was crucified, and is risen.” This is what it means to be formed into the image

⁶⁹ With reference to the form of Christ and the form of humans: being is preserved so that the real human being receives the form of Christ; this is continuously assumed by Bonhoeffer when he speaks about conformation.

of Christ; Secondly, it is “precisely because of the form of Christ [that] the form of a real human being is reserved, so that the real human being receives the form of Christ” (see DBWE 6:99).

Closely linked to Bonhoeffer’s idea, that ‘Christ is the ground of human reality,’ is the equally important issue, viz., how Jesus Christ affects reality and how reality takes form in the church.

Bonhoeffer asserts that,

... human beings are not transformed into an alien form, the form of God, but into the form ... [which] belongs to them, that is essentially their own. Human beings become human because God became human⁷⁰ (DBWE 6:96).

Bonhoeffer perceives humans as incapable of accomplishing a change in form; God changes God’s form into human form so that human beings can become, not God, but humans before God.⁷¹

Bonhoeffer stresses that “‘formation’ means therefore in the first place Jesus Christ taking form in Christ’s church. Here it is the very form of Jesus Christ that takes form” (see DBWE 6:96).

Bonhoeffer states that Jesus Christ exists in the church community-of-faith, and it is only there that humans can assume Christ’s form. Bonhoeffer maintains if the above is not accurate then,

The desire of the one who took on human form to take form in all humans remains to this hour unsatisfied. He who bore the form of the human being can only take form in a small flock; this is Christ’s church (DBWE 6:96).

The church in which Christ takes form is a small flock existing as church community who “may be called the body of Christ because in the body of Jesus Christ, *human beings per se*, and therefore all human beings, have really been taken on”⁷² (see DBWE 6:96). Subsequently, it is only in the church community that a new life may be experienced because Jesus Christ has taken form in it. Bonhoeffer insists:

The church is nothing but that piece of humanity where Christ really has taken form and not any form besides Christ’s own. The church community is the human being who has become human and has been awakened to new life in Christ (DBWE 6:97).

⁷⁰ See Editor’s note [85]. In German Protestantism in 1940 it was rare to hold that on the basis of the incarnation, God becoming-human in Jesus Christ, human beings become human in the full sense (DBWE 6:96).

⁷¹ See Editor’s note [86]. Contrast to this the patristic formulation that God took human form in order for human beings to be ‘divinised’ (DBWE 6:96).

⁷² See Editor’s note in DBWE [90]: Here Bonhoeffer adopts the Christological doctrine of *anhypostasia* from patristic theology, according to which in the incarnation God took on human nature as such, and not only the nature of an individual human being (2005).

Consequently, the starting point for the Christian's new life is realised in a threefold manner. First, "the starting point of Christian ethics is in the body of Christ," the church community; then as the "form of Christ in the form of the church"; and ultimately as the "formation of the church according to the form of Christ" (see DBWE 6:97). Above all, Bonhoeffer stresses that it is within this context of the church community that the idea of humanity needs to be addressed instead of its pure form; namely, the form of Jesus Christ, the reality of God, that is its own (see DBWE 6:98).

Thus far in his discussion on 'ethics as formation,' Bonhoeffer highlighted the importance of 'formation,' namely, the form that God and Christ assume in the world; more so, the form Christ assumes in the church community. Bonhoeffer's ideas on 'formation' are not confined to this manuscript in *Ethics*. In essence, the editor's introduction to *Discipleship* includes the suggestion that in the final chapter of *Discipleship*, his discussion of 'the image of Jesus Christ' is interrelated to his study of 'Ethics as Formation' found in *Ethics*. The editors believe that Bonhoeffer incorporated parts of the last chapter of *Discipleship* into this manuscript, especially the term the 'incarnate one' (*menschgewordene*). This suggests a strong continuity between *Discipleship* and *Ethics*, characteristically in his Christology, theology, and thinking, more specifically in his Christology, mainly in his understanding of the 'two natures' of Christ. For this reason, I deduce that Bonhoeffer adhered to the Chalcedonian Definition, by emphasising the humanity of Jesus Christ in *Ethics*.

Bonhoeffer presupposes that ethics as formation is only possible if the starting point for formation is found in the form of Jesus Christ, who exists in the church community (Christ's church). The church is the place where Jesus Christ takes shape, is proclaimed, and where formation takes place (see DBWE 6:102). The Christian ethic serves this proclamation, and this event, which is ethics as formation, in the same way as the form of Christ exists in the church community (see DBWE 6:102). The church community becomes like Christ only "when the form of Christ works upon us in such a manner that it moulds our form in His own likeness" (see DBWE 4:21). In the following section, I will continue to develop the idea of God becoming a human being (*mensch*), viz., in the embodiment of God in Christ.

8.4 The Concept of Heritage and Guilt

This section is brief since it relates only to Bonhoeffer's understanding of *Menschwerdung*. I will discuss the concept of history (concerning heritage) and then turn to the idea of guilt, also investigating how Bonhoeffer understood the evolving views of the human and divine natures of Christ. For Bonhoeffer, when the concept of heritage is placed within the context of history, it leans toward a proper understanding of God's legacy. God "entered into history at a definite place and time, in which God became human in Jesus Christ" (see DBWE 6:104).

How does understanding history become relevant? Bonhoeffer stresses that when Christians "understand it in relation to the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ," then history becomes relevant. If it is realised this way, it "brings a lasting and irremovable tension into every historical event" (see DBWE 6:104). In this instance, Bonhoeffer stresses that the historical events, the incarnation, and crucifixion, similarly became ahistorical antiquities event⁷³ (see DBWE 6:104). History becomes relevant because, as a historical person, Jesus Christ is the permanency of our history – this is when God's time came into fulfilment, in which God became human. It is the world that God, in becoming human, took on and at which God used the opportunity to spread the Christian message. For Bonhoeffer, the relic of the past could only have historical credence through Jesus Christ – where the incarnation is put forth more "strongly in the foreground" of Christian awareness, where "Christ is both the incarnate and the crucified" (see DBWE 6: 104,107).

Most of the ideas related to *Menschwerdung* in this manuscript present us with traces of Bonhoeffer's adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation of the 'two natures' of Christ. In this manuscript, Bonhoeffer continually stresses that God became human in Christ by entering history at a definite time and place, therefore, making the God-human both human and divine. These vestiges of Bonhoeffer's adherence to the Chalcedonian Definition continue to unfold in *Ethics* as Bonhoeffer clearly emphasises the humanity of Jesus, which he will extend in his discussion on guilt.

⁷³ Bonhoeffer presumed that Christians bore a relationship with Roman and Greek antiquity as German Christians also bore a pre-Christian ethnic past.

In defining the concept of guilt as opposed to the idea of heritage, Bonhoeffer stresses that “the issue [here, with the concept of guilt] is the process by which Christ takes form among us ... [here] the issue is [about] the real, judged, and renewed human being” (see DBWE 6:134), who can only exist when conformed into Christ; and, therefore, a clear distinction exists only if this human being is in Christ’s form. Bonhoeffer wanted to stress that “only the person taken on⁷⁴ in Christ is the real human being, and since God became a human being in Christ, all thinking about human beings without Christ is unfruitful abstraction” (see DBWE 6:134).

In the same manner, guilt is like “the falling away from Christ, from the form of the One who would take form in us and lead us to our own true form” (see DBWE 6:135). The ramifications of the guilt caused by “falling away” requires us to “turn back in acknowledgement of guilt toward Christ” (see DBWE 6:135). For this purpose, God has prepared a place where the acknowledgement of this guilt becomes real; that is, the church. The church community “is where Jesus makes his form real in the midst of the world” allowing the church community to confess their guilt (see DBWE 6:135).

In Bonhoeffer’s discussion on guilt he often alludes to the incarnation using related expressions like: ‘person taken on,’ ‘Christ is the real human being,’ and ‘God became a human being in Christ.’ These expressions are relevant when contemplating *Menschwerdung* because they shed light on Bonhoeffer’s adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ. Admittedly, in this manuscript, Bonhoeffer places more emphasis on the humanity of Jesus, as will become apparent in the next manuscript.

8.5 The Ultimate and Penultimate Things

In this manuscript, Bonhoeffer repeatedly asserts that any discussion on the relationship between the ultimate⁷⁵ and the penultimate⁷⁶ can only be understood in relation to Christ. For

⁷⁴ See Editor’s note [2]. Here, as often, Bonhoeffer uses the verb *annehmen*, the standard German theological word to describe Christ ‘taking on,’ or ‘assuming,’ humanity – the whole of human nature – by becoming human in the incarnation (DWBE 6:134).

⁷⁵ See Editor’s note [2]. *Letztes*, ‘ultimate,’ replaces *Allerletztes* ‘very last.’ Bonhoeffer uses ‘ultimate’ in two senses, qualitatively (i.e., most important) and temporally (i.e., last, final) (DBWE 6:146).

⁷⁶ The distinction between ‘ultimate’ and ‘penultimate’ is discussed in detail from pages 149-153 in DBWE 6.

Bonhoeffer, these relationships become clear in lieu of the three acts of God, viz., the theology of the incarnation, the theology of the cross, and the theology of resurrection. “In Jesus Christ we believe in the God, who became human, was crucified and is raised” (DBWE 6:157). It is in these acts of God that God’s love toward humankind is recognised. Bonhoeffer believed that to tear these symbols apart would be damaging because “the whole [Christian life] is contained in each of them”; and demand being retained to “exist in their unity” (see DBWE 6:157). Bonhoeffer cautions that any ethic built solely on one of these acts (theologies) “would lead easily to the compromised solution” or would “fall into radicalism and enthusiasm” (DBWE 6:157).

In discussing the first, the theology of the incarnation, Bonhoeffer affirms that,

Jesus Christ as the human being means that God enters into created reality, that we may be and should be human beings before God and Jesus Christ’s being human [*Menschsein*] does not mean simply the confirmation of the existing world and of human existence. Jesus was human ‘without sin’ (Heb. 4:15); that is the decisive thing (DBWE 6:157).

Bonhoeffer believed that although Jesus lived a condemned life, embodied in “the absolute condemnation of sin and of existing human orders,” he continued to live this life because he understood what His condemnation was really. He was human “and want[s] us to be humans [too], [therefore] he let[s] human reality exist as penultimate” (see DBWE 6:157).

Regarding the second symbol, the theology of the cross, Bonhoeffer highlights that “Jesus Christ as the crucified means that God speaks final judgment on the fallen creation” (see DBWE 6:158). Jesus’ cross is the death sentence on the world, and it is here that human beings cannot boast of their being human because human glory has come to an end in the crucifixion (see DBWE 6:158).

Lastly, in discussing the theology of resurrection, Bonhoeffer points out: “Jesus Christ as the resurrected means that God makes an end of death and calls a new creation into life. God gives new life” (see DBWE 6:158). More importantly, for Bonhoeffer, “if Jesus has risen as human, ... he gives human beings the gift of resurrection ... so that the unity and differentiation of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection should be clear” (see DBWE 6:158). For Bonhoeffer, the Christian life cannot be lived without the knowledge of Jesus Christ, who became human,

was crucified, and is resurrected. In sum:

The Christian life means being human [*Menschsein*] in the power of Christ's becoming human, being judged and being pardoned in the power of the cross, and living a life in the power of the resurrection. No one of these is without the others (DBWE 6:159).

Bonhoeffer developed a trinitarian formula from the discussion on the symbols of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. This formula is designed to resolve the issue of which foundation the Christian life is to be built on and be settled in; he concludes that Christ can only determine the Christian life, the God who became human, was crucified and is raised. Human reality exists as penultimate ("living on toward judgement"), but the "ultimate has become real in the cross as judgement on all that is penultimate" (see DBWE 6:158). In the crucifixion, the ultimate became real, and more importantly, in the resurrection, the ultimate gave hints of an end and a future, to be exact, the resurrection gives the ultimate sign of living reality.

What does Bonhoeffer seek to accentuate by using three unifying acts of God, as discussed above? It becomes apparent that for Bonhoeffer, it is only through Jesus Christ, the God who became human, and entered into the fallen world, that God "could bring fulfilment to being – and being good" (see DBWE 6:165). For Bonhoeffer, if seen from a "Christian perspective," the fallen world was preserved and maintained by God only for the coming of Christ [the incarnation] (see DBWE 6:165). Bonhoeffer stresses that this world is a world protected by God in which human beings can and should live a "good" life in Christ, and the fallen world should always be seen from a Christian perspective (see DBWE 6:165).

Following the discussion on the relationship between the ultimate and the penultimate in relation to God who became human, was crucified and was raised, Bonhoeffer moves to the question of history and the good.

8.6 History and Good [1]

In Bonhoeffer's discussion on history and the good in relation to human ethics, he stresses that choices made by isolated individuals between "clearly recognised good and clearly recognised evil," can be "acknowledged as a major ethical decision" (see DBWE 6:220). Bonhoeffer

contends that if individuals make the right choice, “the ethical task followed is viewed as applying [that is, action] specific principles, regardless of the consequences for the particular context” (DBWE 6:220). In effect, the right action that is required is the “action of the responsible person, [which] is most profoundly in accord[ance] with reality” (see DBWE 6:220). He argues that aligning ethics “in accordance with reality” takes the individual to the most fundamental reality, i.e., the reality of the God who became human. In further discussing “being in accordance with reality,” Bonhoeffer explains more precisely what it means to be in the reality of God (see DBWE 6:222). Kelly suggests that when Bonhoeffer refers to the reality of the God who became human, he

... aims to reinvigorate the incarnational perspective that dictated his earlier Christocentric emphasis. By appealing to the incarnational structure of all reality Bonhoeffer hoped to promote human values and to defend civil rights (Kelly 1990:375).

For Bonhoeffer, the most fundamental reality is the reality of the God who became human;⁷⁷ and this reality significantly provided “both the ultimate foundation and the ultimate negation of everything that actually exists” (see DBWE 6:223). In the same manner, the world is accepted and affirmed only because God became human. Bonhoeffer states that,

... the affirmation of human beings is based on God’s taking on humanity, not *vice versa* ... [neither] did God take on humanity because human beings were worthy of divine affirmation. Instead, it is because human beings deserved the divine No that God took on humanity and affirmed it; God became human, thus bearing and suffering, as God, the curse of the divine No upon human nature (DBWE 6:223).

Nissen (2011:332) hypothesises that “this responsive affirmation of reality [viz., that God became human] is closely linked to the Christological character of reality – a Chalcedonian motif” (see Nissen 2011:332). He suggests that it is only because [God became human] that the world could remain, as God has taken care of the world and declared it under his rule (see Nissen 2011:332). Nissen’s argument seems plausible and consistent because up till now, he agrees with Bonhoeffer’s rationale in this manuscript. Only because God became human (through the revelation of Jesus Christ) that action in accordance with reality was made possible, that is, found within the reality of the God who became human (see DBWE 6:223).

⁷⁷ See Editor’s note [21]. Deleted is ‘in Jesus Christ.’ This includes an insertion by Bonhoeffer written in 1941: ‘that reality ... is ultimately one in God who became human, Jesus Christ’ (DBWE 6:223).

So what does God's action in accordance with reality mean?

In Christ, all human reality is taken on. That is why it is ultimately only in and from Christ that it is possible to act in a way that is in accord with reality [that is, to act responsibly]; ... to act responsibly means to include in the formation of action human reality as it has been taken on by God in Christ (see DBWE 6:224).

Bonhoeffer concludes that responsible action means that any deed is done "after responsibly weighing all circumstances in light of God becoming human in Christ, is completely surrendered to God" (see DBWE 6:224, 227). As a result, "good is historical action that sees given, concrete reality grounded and sustained by the reality of God's becoming human" (see DBWE 6:228). Consequently, the reality of God, by allowing "the world to be world without ever forgetting that God has claimed this world," is "good historical action that receives its laws of historical action from the centre of history, from the event of God's becoming human"⁷⁸ (see DBWE 6:228). Bonhoeffer states that,

... good is the action that is in accordance with the reality of Jesus Christ; action in accordance with Christ is action in accord with reality (DBWE 6:229).

Humanity did not merit the divine, but a substitute was provided and affirmed by God, who took on our humanity. God became human in the body, which caused God to suffer and to accept the scourge of the divine. Bonhoeffer asserts that if the aforementioned is "correctly understood, it is a statement that springs from reality itself"; this is the 'action in accordance with reality' (see DBWE 6:229).

Bonhoeffer's understanding of reality can be rendered in the following ways. First, the construct of reality can only be fathomed by grasping the incarnation, that is, by understanding that the incarnation is about God taking on our humanity. Following this, God entered history and assumed a distinct reality in history through the reality of Jesus Christ. Subsequently, Jesus qualifies because he became the bearer of this reality and was subjected to the reality of being in a body and is able to speak out of this depth of reality as no other human can speak.

In confirming this thesis, Bonhoeffer refers to the *Sermon on the Mount*:

What is overlooked here is the fact that the Sermon on the Mount is the word of the one

⁷⁸ In Bonhoeffer's working notes of *Ethics* (No. 37) we find the following reference to the aspect of 'God becoming human': "The laws of historical action flow from the centre of history. Christ and the commandments. The sermon on the Mount" (DBWE 6:228, footnote 42).

who did not relate to reality as a foreigner ... but as the one who bore and experienced the nature of reality in his own body (DBWE 6:231).

The *Sermon on the Mount* implies that Jesus Christ is understood and interpreted as the word. Jesus Christ is the very one who is Lord and as the law of reality. Jesus Christ is the word of God who became human. Jesus embodies a person who lives responsibly, and His actions are in accordance with reality. By implication, the totality of Jesus' whole life, conflict, and suffering is vicarious representative action [*Stellvertretung*].⁷⁹ Jesus, who became human, is the human who stands in the place of all humans by taking responsibility for their sake in his incarnation because He suffered (see DBWE 6:231). Bonhoeffer asserts, that in the same way as,

Jesus Christ becomes the responsible human being par excellence [the] real vicarious representative action in which Christ's human existence consists [is not] presumptuous and overbearing (DBWE 6:232).

It is not overbearing because it is "grounded in God's becoming human, which brought about the real vicarious representative action of Jesus Christ" (DBWE 6:232). Bonhoeffer resumes his discussion on the *Sermon on the Mount* by saying:

The Sermon on the Mount confronts those who are compelled to act within history with God in Jesus Christ, thus placing them into genuine Christian responsibility [and] this Christian responsibility encompasses all activity within the world ... because it is grounded in the reality of God's becoming human, it pulls the rug out from under the false realism (DBWE 6:239).

Bonhoeffer questions this "false realism"⁸⁰ since it opposes the reality of the incarnation, and presents us with one that fails to understand the meaning of the Christian concept of love, the idea of self-denial and the concepts of forgiveness and innocence (see DBWE 6:239). In all likelihood, the explanation, as mentioned earlier of reality can be construed as being Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology. The reality of God (the incarnation) allows humanity to exist within the purity of love and to continue living in a worldly context and form. For Bonhoeffer, the Christian action of love "springs from God's love that became incarnate," presaged in the *Sermon on the Mount* as the proclamation of the incarnate love (see DBWE

⁷⁹ This term is also found in *Sanctorum Communio* – Bonhoeffer asserts that the 'vicarious representative action' [*Stellvertretung*], 'as a theological concept in the strict sense is rooted in Christology and refers to the free initiative and responsibility that Christ takes for the sake of humanity in his incarnation (DBWE 1:120).

⁸⁰ The false realism Bonhoeffer refers to is Christian responsibility that is confined to some kind of isolated religious sphere.

6:242).

Bonhoeffer's intention in using the *Sermon on the Mount* in the context of the reality of God is to illustrate the following: The *Sermon on the Mount* is not designed simply to prepare individuals for their task as a community,⁸¹ but to claim humanity within the very midst of their responsible action itself (see DBWE 6:243). Christ's reality must become concrete in the Christian's experience as the life lived in this reality of the incarnation. Christians are to live audaciously in this world, encompassing all responsible activity and not confined to some kind of isolated religious sphere (see DBWE 6:243).

Discussing the responsible action of Christians in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, Dudzus says that, disconnected as it may seem, Bonhoeffer appeals to Christians to stand out boldly (see Dudzus 1966:238). Dudzus infers, that Bonhoeffer,

... learned to affirm the world – not, to be sure, the world in and by itself, but the world as marked by the incarnation, the cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ [and] it is the concern of Christian witness not to linger too far behind because the world as marked by the incarnation, the cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the church is led by its Lord far in advance (Dudzus 1966:238).

Dudzus' explanation expands on how the reality of God, who became human, plays out in the Christian's life as a Christian witness. For Dudzus, it indicates that the church's witness even "today" must be marked by the reality of God who became human (see Dudzus 1966:238).

In this manuscript, Bonhoeffer emphasises that "good is historical action established in the concrete reality grounded and sustained by the reality of God's becoming human" (see DBWE 6:228). Bonhoeffer's idea of 'God becoming human' (*mensch* – the humanity of Jesus) that he develops early in this manuscript, is an idea that he will pursue in the following manuscript.

8.7 History and Good [2]

In his second manuscript on history and the good Bonhoeffer suggests that the question about the good "is still incomplete," and cannot be separated from the problem of life and of history (see DBWE 6:247). For Bonhoeffer, the question "needs to be asked and decided in the midst

⁸¹ See Editor's note [95]. The phrase 'in the community' is added in blue pencil. The five lines that follow in the manuscript are deleted and rewritten (the deleted passage ends with 'it calls the individual into the reality of the love of God become human.'). (DBWE 6:243).

of situations in our life that are both determined in a particular way and yet still incomplete, unique and yet already in transition” (see DBWE 6:247). My interest in this section is not about Bonhoeffer’s question on good but rather his concern regarding life itself,

... since Jesus Christ said of himself, ‘I am the life,’ no Christian thinking can any longer ignore this claim and the reality it contains (DBWE 6:249).

I deduce that the ‘question of life’ in this manuscript relates to Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Ethics*. In this manuscript, Bonhoeffer expounds on the aspect of Life by saying that Life cannot “be reduced” to a thing or an essence, but rather that Life is a person, Jesus Christ (see DBWE 6:249). Bonhoeffer emphasises that this person uniquely is life, and yet not in possessing life, among other attributes, but as an I, the I of Jesus (see DBWE 6:249). Bonhoeffer expresses that “I am the Life” is the word, the revelation, the proclamation of Jesus. It is in the word of Jesus, and we hear the No spoken over our lives, which is not life, or rather, is life only in the sense that even in our contradiction we still live from the life called Jesus Christ. The life that is the origin, essence, and goal of all life and our life (see DBWE 6:250). The editors to *Ethics* infer that Bonhoeffer’s anthropological formula of “origin, essence, and goal,”⁸² repeated several times in this manuscript, is an implicit Trinitarian reference to God the Creator, the incarnate Christ who is truly human, and the Holy Spirit who consummates eschatological redemption (see DBWE 6:251[14]). My concern in this study is not so much the Trinitarian formula but Bonhoeffer’s view on the ‘two natures’ of Christ in the different manuscripts. He uses the word *menschwerdung* repeatedly to reference the one aspect of ‘two natures’ of Christ the incarnation, viz., about the revelation of the God who became a human being (*mensch*).

Following the above, after explaining origin, essence, and goal, Bonhoeffer turns his attention again to the question about the good, particularly of our life. Good, Bonhoeffer asserts, is “definitely not an abstraction from life, such as realization of certain values independent of life, but life itself” (DBWE 6:253). Bonhoeffer postulates that “good is life as it is in reality, that is, in its origin, essence, and goal” (anthropological formula) (DBWE 6:253). Bonhoeffer stresses that life should be understood by the assertion that my life exists in Christ, and Life is shrouded

⁸² This formula is frequently used in ‘History and Good [2]’ and in Bonhoeffer’s concluding remarks in the manuscripts of *Ethics* (DBWE 6:246-98, 402).

in the concreteness of this life. Bonhoeffer explains those, as mentioned earlier, as “lying outside life itself, namely, in Jesus Christ, who is the Jesus Christ the human being and God in one” (see DBWE 6:253). Bonhoeffer affirms life that exists in Christ can be accepted with the full realization that,

... human beings are accepted in God’s becoming human and are loved, judged and reconciled in Christ, and God is the God who became human (DBWE 6:253).

Bonhoeffer now turns his attention to fashioning his idea of ‘this life’ by positioning it within the context and structure of a responsible life (as discussed earlier). I mentioned in this section that Bonhoeffer structures his notions on responsibility around a ‘responsibility based on vicarious representative action [*Stellvertretung*]⁸³ (see DBWE 6:257). Bonhoeffer maintains that,

[Because of His responsible life Jesus became] the life, our life, the Son of God who became human, living as our vicarious representation and all that human beings were supposed to live, do, and suffer was fulfilled in him (DBWE 6:258).

However, Bonhoeffer cautions that the vicariously responsible life risks being corrupted by human beings; that is, the “vicariously representative life and actions essentially need to be directed toward responsible actions relationally from one human being to another” (DBWE 6:259). Relationships need to be carefully sustained because “Christ became human and thus bore the vicarious representative responsibility for all human beings” (DBWE 6:259). Most importantly, the vicariously responsible life demands that humans take accountability for being responsible toward: all things, conditions, values that are determined by Christ and toward the God who became human (see DBWE 6:259). Bonhoeffer understood that this reality of the God who became human still calls Christians today to a life of responsible action, like the Christ, who still bears a vicarious responsibility for all humans. This means that like the incarnate Christ who bore us vicariously, Christians should too take within ourselves an indirect responsibility for fellow Christians and humanity alike.

At this point in the *Ethics* manuscripts, Bonhoeffer departs from the idea of *mensch* and moves

⁸³ See Editor’s note [38] (DBWE 6:257). ‘Vicarious representative action’ is one of Bonhoeffer’s central theological and ethical ideas; this Christological aspect is developed in *Sanctorum Communio* [DBWE 1:120, 146f, 155f, 182ff,187f].

to a more pressing ethical theme – the proclamation of the church in the Nazi world. Bonhoeffer stresses that “the message of the church to the [Nazi] world can be none other than the word of God to the world” (DBWE 6:356). Bonhoeffer emphasises that,

... the church’s message to the world [should be the] word about the coming of God in the flesh, and about God’s love for the world in the sending of God’s Son (DBWE 6:356).

Bonhoeffer stipulates that “proclamation is the specific mandate given to the church,” and the “church proclaims the word of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ” (see DBWE 6:396).

Bonhoeffer stresses that in place of God and Jesus stands the bearer of preaching, and that,

The preacher is not the mouthpiece of the congregation but instead the mouth piece of God vis-à-vis the congregation; who then becomes God’s proclamation of both Jesus’ divinity and incarnation (DBWE 6:396).

The church [preacher] proclaims Jesus Christ as the eternal Son with the Father in eternity and Jesus Christ, the God who became flesh (see DBWE 6:399). The church’s proclamation is identified as the message of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son who existed with the Father in eternity. This is affirmed by the message of Jesus Christ, God who became human, was crucified and reconciled, but now the risen and exalted Lord. The expressions concerning the church’s proclamation are clear indications that Bonhoeffer never departed from his adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ.

8.8 Concluding Remarks

Bonhoeffer’s Christological paragraph in *Ethics* (see DBWE 6:400), in which he outlines the proclamation for the church, summarises his Christology and signifies that he never departed from his adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ. Bonhoeffer writes:

... that God has bodily taken on human nature in its entirety, that from now on divine being can be found nowhere else but in human form, that in Jesus Christ human beings are set free to be truly human before God. Now the ‘Christian’ is not something beyond the human, but it wants to be in the midst of the human. What is ‘Christian’ is not an end in itself, but means that human beings may and should live as human before God. In becoming human, God is revealed as the one who seeks to be there not for God’s own sake but ‘for us.’ To live as a human being before God, in light of God’s becoming human, can only mean to be there not for oneself, but for God and for other human beings (DBWE 6:400).

In the above extract, Bonhoeffer indicates God’s intent for human beings; that is, God became

human (*Menschwerdung*) so that human beings can live as [ethical] human beings before God. The references to *Menschwerdung* in this extract also shows Bonhoeffer's adherence to the Chalcedonian Definition, from which he never departed. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer continually recognises that,

The two natures [of Christ is] without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God, the Word, Lord Jesus Christ (Chalcedonian Definition 451).

Feil confirms that Bonhoeffer never deviated from the Chalcedonian Definition of the 'two natures' of Christ, and suggests that in *Ethics* "ideas of Bonhoeffer's earlier theology are taken up and developed further" (see Feil 1985:84), and that,

Ethics provides important evidence that there is continuity in the structure and central idea of Bonhoeffer's theology and that all of these ideas are increasingly grounded in Christology (Feil 1985:84).

Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Ethics* often leads one to his concept of Christ's reality (*Christuswirklichkeit*). Christ existed as the revelation of God – the God who became a human being (*mensch*). As the community of Christ, Christians, too, need to embrace the reality of their existence in the world. Hence the Christian is never separated from the world, nor is the world separated from Christ – therefore, the Christian cannot but embrace the God who became flesh and continues to do so today.

From the above ideas, one could assume that Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Ethics* is closely associated with how he develops the relationship that exists between Christ and the reality of God. One can expect that in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer adhered to the Chalcedonian formulation of the 'two natures' of Christ – even though he focuses on the aspect of *Menschwerdung* in *Ethics*. For Bonhoeffer, Christ becomes the reality of God and the reality of the world in such a unique way that Bonhoeffer can formulate his understanding of the Chalcedonian formulation of the 'two natures' of Christ. He does so by first explaining that Jesus Christ is the reality of God, the revelation of God, and Jesus Christ is God's self-revelation; and then he develops the idea of *Menschwerdung*. In effect, Bonhoeffer's continual reference to *Menschwerdung* affirms his adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation. He stresses that God and Jesus Christ "come

together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons,” yet existing as both human and divine – Jesus and God share the aspect of becoming *mensch*.

Nissen suggests that Bonhoeffer’s adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ is ingrained in *Ethics*, proposing:

... a continuous theme in [*Ethics*] is the affirmation of the reality of God [a theme that] is related to [Bonhoeffer’s] Christological understanding of reality shaped by a Chalcedonian view of the two natures of Christ (Nissen 2011:330).

Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* not only reveals that he embraced important ideas and theologies from his earlier works but also that he continually adhered to the Chalcedonian formulation on the ‘two natures’ of Christ. He would reflect on them anew in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*.



Chapter 9 Letters and Papers from Prison

9.1 Introduction

Unlike some of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's earlier writings, the posthumous *Letters and Papers from Prison* (1949) received significant attention soon after they were published. The collections were published first in English in 1953 and again in 2010, in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Series. This edition of *Letters and Papers from Prison* is translated from the revised, enlarged, and critical German edition of *Widerstand und Ergebung* (DBW), first published in 1988. Besides Bethge's correspondence, this new edition includes letters from Bonhoeffer's parents, brother, niece, nephew, and other individuals. *Letters and Papers from Prison* present the reader with evocative phrases such as 'a world come of age,' 'the religious *a priori*' and 'religionless Christianity.' Part of the charm of *Letters and Papers from Prison*'s resides in the ungoverned spontaneity, even fragmentariness, of Bonhoeffer's reflections on personal matters and theological matters. This edition is divided into four parts: starting with Bonhoeffer's interrogation period, dated April–July 1943; his second period of awaiting trial, dated August 1943–April 1944; the third period, "holding out for the coup attempt" dated April–July 1944 – a period of contemplation with the attempt to assassinate Hitler; and the fourth period, "after the failure" dated July 1944–February 1945, which include the theological letters with the well-known provocative phrases mentioned before (see DBWE 8:11-16).

The Christocentric elements in *Letters and Papers from Prison* are not easy to follow since they are integrated within statements about Jesus Christ expressed in the form of letters written to his friend Eberhard Bethge and others. Given these constraints, I will piece together those segments of the letters that reflect Bonhoeffer's Christology. One aspect that stands out in his prison letters is Bonhoeffer's repetition of the well-known question, 'Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?' (see DBWE 8:362). Bonhoeffer regards Jesus Christ as the locus where we can recognise God amidst life, and it is in this 'midst' that Jesus Christ takes hold of the centre of our lives – marking *Letters and Papers from Prison* as a profoundly Christocentric collection of writings. The letters that I will focus on are those that are relevant to Bonhoeffer's Christology, particularly regarding the 'two natures' of Christ. I will also examine *Letters and*

Papers from Prison as intended for the exposition of ‘Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?’

My focus in the discussion on the letters is not so much on the prison letters in general as on the question of whether Christology could be regarded as the key to Bonhoeffer’s prison letters. Implied in this focus is the question of whether there is a change in his Christological views or a radicalization of emphasis on God becoming human in Christ. The focus in this study remains the same, that is, to examine Bonhoeffer’s evolving views on the ‘two natures’ of Christ in the letters. There remains the possibility that Bonhoeffer’s views on the person of Christ changed, that is, that God is becoming human and that we need to live our lives as if there is no God amongst us (because this God became human). If this notion is veritable, one could assume that the divine nature is underplayed more and more in Bonhoeffer’s writings, especially in the prison letters. Feil (1985:91) suggests that if we piece together some of the letters written to different audiences, we may gain new insights into Bonhoeffer’s plea “that Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different.”

Other scholars propose that Bonhoeffer’s prison letters offer a ‘non-religious interpretation of Christianity.’ This approach to interpreting *Letters and Papers from Prison* has elicited more debate than any other aspect of his life and teaching, particularly Bonhoeffer’s views on a ‘non-religious interpretation of Christianity.’ From the vantage point of such an assumption, one could assume that this might just be the core of Bonhoeffer’s theology and Christology; and possibly the gist of the prison letters. This view sets the background for the argument to the prison letters, as discussed in the next section.

In this section, I briefly introduced how *Letters and Papers from Prison* are constructed and discuss the provocative nature and diversity of the letters. Section 2 will offer some background to the argument of *Letters and Papers from Prison* and present an overview of what scholars are saying about Bonhoeffer’s Christology in the letters. In Section 3, I will give an argument for continuity regarding theology and Christology in the *Letters and Papers from Prison*, while keeping an open mind to the possibility of discontinuity. In Sections 4 to 7, I will look at selected letters that are pertinent to Christology, particularly relating to the ‘two natures’ of Christ. I intend to determine how two natures Bonhoeffer develops the ‘two natures’ of Christ

in these letters and how it is related to his Christology.

9.2 Background to the argument of *Letters and Papers from Prison*

For the most part, in this section, I use the editor's introduction to the English edition of *Letters and Papers from Prison*, and the afterword to the German version. The editor focuses primarily on explanations to the background, reception, arguments, arrangement of the text, and the interpretation of *Letters and Papers from Prison*. The editor's assumptions and approach to the letters are plausible and present viable alternatives to interpreting the letters. His analysis best suits my intention to explain the background to the argument of *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

The editor furnishes the reader with a wealth of information on different themes found in the book. One of those themes is the mixed reception and interpretation of *Letters and Papers from Prison*, commencing with the German response to the first edition of *Widerstand und Ergebung*. The editor proposes that the German response was "largely confined to theological circles in the academy and the church" (see DBWE 8:19). Besides, the fragmentary character of the letters did not draw much attention from the academy in Germany as from those in the East and West, "who were concerned about the renewal of the life of the church and its witness in society" (see DBWE 8:19).

The editor also suggests that in the Anglo-Saxon world, the response to *Letters and Papers from Prison* was different. Their academics were attracted to theologians in North America, theologians who were engaged in the hermeneutical debates of their times that were being shaped by Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth. Britain's Ronald Gregor Smith was first instrumental in publishing Bonhoeffer's writings in English. More works on Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* later emerged, and the most productive discussion on Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* came from the Anglo-Saxon world by Bishop John Robinson. The editor suggests that Robinson's book *Honest to God* influenced the reception and reading of Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*; and "made headline news, often sensational, in both the secular and the religious press" (see DBWE 8:19).

The editor also offers the reader an explanation of Bonhoeffer's "new theology," which Eberhard Bethge referred to as Bonhoeffer's theological reflection on Christianity in "a world come of age" (see DBWE 8:20). The editor states that during his incarceration Bonhoeffer "recognized afresh his indebtedness to the liberal protestant legacy in which he had been nurtured at the University of Berlin," namely, Karl Barth's theology (see DBWE 8:22f). Bonhoeffer also simultaneously leaned towards Adolf Harnack's liberal Protestant theology. The editor purports that,

In many respects, Bonhoeffer's prison theology was an attempt to engage critically both Barth's neo-orthodoxy and liberal Protestantism as represented by Harnack, in an attempt to restate the meaning of Christ for today (DBWE 8:22f).

With Barth, he kept the Christological focus. With Harnack, he positively engaged modernity, leading to questions that would later take hold of Bonhoeffer's Christological and theological thinking on 'What is Christianity?' or 'What is Christianity for us today?' (see DBWE 8:23).

The editor also proposes that the Bonhoeffer who emerges in the prison letters embraced within himself both a genuine Christian commitment and a humanist interest. Bonhoeffer showed a keen interest in life as it existed in the world in all its complex richness. It is increasingly acknowledged among Bonhoeffer scholars that his prison letters point strongly toward a new form of Christian humanism. Incidentally, this was the theme of the 9th International Bonhoeffer Conference held in Rome in 2004. If we accept this view, then Bonhoeffer's concept of humanism can only be assumed because of his humanistic Christology, that comes to the fore in *Ethics*, especially given the idea of the 'becoming human' (*Menschwerdung*) of God through Christ. Bonhoeffer assumed that just as Christ became "fully human," so the Christian life should no longer be seen in terms of becoming a religious person but in those of becoming more truly human⁸⁴ (see DBWE 8:29). One could assume that this makes Bonhoeffer's view on the incarnation very humanist in nature.

In the next section, I will develop an argument for both continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology and Christology, as found in the *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Secondary scholarship presents many arguments that suggest that Bonhoeffer's theology and

⁸⁴ This concept was examined in *Ethics*, viz., *the mensch*.

Christology changed during the development of his prison correspondence, particularly in his analysis of a ‘world coming of age’; and how we need to rethink the Christian faith in every way. Besides, inquiries on Bonhoeffer’s theology and Christology in the *Letters and Papers from Prison* often focus on specific phrases, particularly ‘religionless Christianity.’ Rasmussen holds that Bonhoeffer’s prison preoccupation was: “How do we forge a viable Christian faith and ethic of responsibility for an epoch of unprecedented power across the whole of earthly life?” (see Rasmussen 2014:946).

Despite earlier scholars’ preoccupation with ‘only’ Bonhoeffer’s prison letters, present-day scholars propose that to ignore the Christological centre in Bonhoeffer’s writings before *Letters and Papers from Prison* would misconstrue him altogether. Thus positing that continuity existed both between Bonhoeffer’s earlier and posthumous writings. Weikart (1997:77) suggests that Bonhoeffer’s friend Bethge presents a nuanced portrayal of continuity and change in Bonhoeffer’s theology. Weikart alleges that Bonhoeffer remained a theologian and a Christian and agrees with Bethge that Bonhoeffer’s prison letters marked a “break-through” and a “decisive new start” in his theology and Christology (see Weikart 1997:77). Weikart supposes that “it is important to understand these shifts when reading Bonhoeffer,” even though some of Bonhoeffer’s ideas “remained unchanged, he definitely altered his emphasis” (see Weikart 1997:77). Weikart cautions “as a consequence, reading one or two of Bonhoeffer’s works in isolation from the rest can skew one’s understanding of his theology” (see Weikart 1997:77).

9.3 Continuity, Discontinuity, and Christology in Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison*

Perhaps the best narrative account of the publishing and reception of *Letters and Papers from Prison* is offered by Martin E. Marty (2011) in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Letters and Papers from Prison: A Biography*. Marty is particularly concerned about tracing an argument *à propos* the continuity and discontinuity of the theology and Christology found in the *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Marty stresses that it is crucial to determine whether there was a shift or change in Bonhoeffer’s theology and Christology leading up to his *Letters and Papers from Prison*,

because,

... if the prison letters are treated in isolation from Bonhoeffer's lifework without reference to its theological substance it would violate the sense of gravity and purpose so consistently manifested in Bonhoeffer's [earlier theology] (Marty 2011:217).

Marty asserts that to address the problem of the earlier and later Bonhoeffer is to ask the question of whether Bonhoeffer's writings were "substantially continuous with what he stood for before his incarceration or are they discontinuous?" (see Marty 2011:215). Marty confesses that it is true that both the European East and West found discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's later writings, which included scholars like Hanfried Muller, Gerhard Ebeling, Ronald Gregor Smith, and John Robinson. These scholars all indeed focused on Bonhoeffer's provocative phrases found in the letters apart from his earlier writings. Unlike those who found discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's later writings, scholars who studied Bonhoeffer's writings both 'before' and 'after' his incarceration argued that continuity existed in his work – mainly carried over into the *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Fuller, who translated and published the first English edition of Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* in 1953, was among the first to describe individual schools who subscribed to a different thought. Fuller, describes those schools which stressed continuity as being "ecclesiological and Christological" and the other schools which emphasised discontinuity he described as "the hermeneutical" (see Marty 2011:217). Fuller himself subscribes to the continuity approach, speaking "critically of the over-eagerness of some theologians" who seized the opportunity to choose the provocative phrases to stress discontinuity (see Marty 2011:217). Marty maintains that "such an assessment did not mean that there had been no important change in [Bonhoeffer's] world and thought" (see Marty 2011:217).

A growing body of literature has examined the continuity, discontinuity, and Christology of Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*. For this reason, I will limit the discussion on the number of Bonhoeffer scholars who investigated the issue of continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology, to Bethge, Philips, Marsh, Pangritz, and Huber.

In his critique of discontinuity, Bethge concludes that when we begin to read Bonhoeffer's early works, after having discovered him through *Letters and Papers from Prison*, we will

... discover with astonishment that there was a broad continuity between the Berlin beginnings and the Tegel period. Formulations and theological suggestions in *Letters and Papers from Prison* that people found shocking proved to be not as new as had been thought; they could be found, even in the same wording (Bethge 1970:889).

In discussing Bonhoeffer's appropriation of a Lutheran Christology in his earlier and posthumous writings, Phillips suggests that,

... the Lutheran Christology of condescension, the conviction that after all has been said, *finitum capax infiniti*, remained the central strand of Bonhoeffer's theology throughout his life until the *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Bonhoeffer accepted the Lutheran tradition with all its risks (Phillips 1967:172).

Marsh also believes that Bonhoeffer maintained a "striking continuity" in his theological thought and his Lutheran tradition, which was etched in his theology as early as in *Act and Being* (see Marsh 1992b:437). Marsh suggests that "Bonhoeffer refused to concede the move to Hegel's idea ... that humanity bears within itself the divine idea"; but instead remained committed to Luther's notion of *finitum capax infiniti* that he enforces in his writings, especially in *Letters and Papers from Prison* (see Marsh 1992b:437).

Pangritz suggests that "it has become customary to regard Christology as the centre of Bonhoeffer's thought," and his Christology remained the same in *Letters and Papers from Prison* (see Pangritz 1999:134). Pangritz claims that "the question 'Who is Jesus Christ?' forms the *cantus firmus* of Bonhoeffer's theological development from beginning to the end" (see Pangritz 1999:134). Pangritz concludes that,

... still in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, the programmatic question 'who is Christ really, for us, today' forms the starting point of Bonhoeffer's new theological reflections (Pangritz 1999:134).

Huber, although concerned with seeking continuity in the theology of Bonhoeffer's earlier and posthumous writings, acknowledges that,

The innovative character of [Bonhoeffer's] theology did not diminish in the times of political involvement and even of custody. On the contrary: His theological reflection seemed to intensify under the pressure of conspiracy and imprisonment (Huber 2014:977).

These views on continuity and discontinuity are in no way conclusive for how the prison letters were examined as a whole and should be read. My discussion on continuity and discontinuity provides evidence for my contention that there is continuity in the structure of Bonhoeffer's theology and Christology in *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

However, several challenges remain: First, there still is the tendency to claim that no continuity is found in Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*, particularly when compared to his earlier corpus. Consequently, most early interpretations of Bonhoeffer's letters are made in isolation from his lifework without reference to his earlier theology. Besides, while in prison, Bonhoeffer himself declared to Bethge that his thoughts were still incomplete; therefore, it would be plausible to assume that while compiling *Ethics* and the prison letters, later on, Bethge "filled in the blanks" (see DBWE 8:181). Bethge destroyed Bonhoeffer's last letters before he was arrested; they could have provided some clarity on Bonhoeffer's later theological letters. Marty infers that when Bethge burned the letters, he "closed the door on speculation about what was in the burned letters" (see Marty 2011:231). Although this can be construed as accurate, Bethge contends,

... [although] I was responsible for the destruction of what may have contained decisive developments of Bonhoeffer's ideas, but developments which I can no longer recall ... there is no longer anything from Bonhoeffer, then, that can take us beyond the theological positions of his published letters (Bethge 1959:4).

One might then ask while considering these challenges: Was Bonhoeffer looking to the future for the 'church existing as a community' after the break-down of Nazism? How are the letters to be read? Are the letters to be read individually within their context? Are the letters to be read and interpreted Christologically?

An obvious point of contention is also evident amongst scholarship in establishing continuity in Bonhoeffer's theology in the prison letters. This first became evident when Bonhoeffer's prison letters were discovered, and there was a large concentration of studies on the provocative phrase 'religionless Christianity.' These scholars stressed discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology. It is only in later scholarship that it was construed that Bonhoeffer's theology, Christology, and the provocative phrases in the prison letters should not be read in isolation from his theology found in his earlier writings. This approach stressed continuity in Bonhoeffer's Christology in contention of views on discontinuity. Nevertheless, no undue attention was given to Bonhoeffer's views on the 'two natures' of Christ in *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

In the next sections I will discuss the ‘theological letters’ written to Eberhard Bethge, and then determine whether they reflect continuity or discontinuity in Bonhoeffer’s theology and Christology – particularly on the ‘two natures’ of Christ. The letters I have chosen are in no specific order but are all relevant to this study, that is, to determine whether the prison letters can be understood Christologically. The letters discussed in this chapter will each provide the headings for sections in the rest of this chapter. Section 4 is Bonhoeffer’s theological letter addressed to Eberhard Bethge (dated April 30, 1944), which contains the provocative phrases: ‘What is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today?’ ‘What is religionless Christianity?’ Moreover, ‘how can Christ become Lord of the religionless?’ These phrases discussed in this letter relate to Bonhoeffer’s understanding of transcendence, with particular reference to the ‘how’ and ‘who’ questions, which I will discuss in detail. In Section 4 I will also include a letter (dated May 29, 1944) in which Bonhoeffer explores the idea of the ‘being of transcendence’ further; handwritten Tegel note 12 (*NL*, A 86); notes to Bethge (I, II, Tegel, dated end of June 1944); and notes to Bethge (I, Tegel, July-August 1944), which all relate to Bonhoeffer’s understanding of transcendence. In Section 5, I will discuss a personal letter, addressed to Bethge (dated May 21, 1944) in which Bonhoeffer reflects theologically on the ‘polyphony of life,’ about how Bethge should love God with the whole heart as a sort of as a *cantus firmus*. These two phrases ‘polyphony of life’ and *cantus firmus* used in this letter become central in understanding Bonhoeffer’s Christology about the ‘two natures’ of Christ. In Section 6, I will discuss a letter (dated July 21, 1944) addressed to Bethge that contains an idea explored by Bonhoeffer as the ‘this-worldliness of Christianity.’ This idea is not only relevant to understanding Bonhoeffer’s Christology (regarding the humanity of God) but is also reminiscent of an idea of how Christians share in Christ’s humanity. In Section 7, I will discuss Bonhoeffer’s poem ‘Who am I’ and related scattered Christological letters.

9.4 The ‘being’ of Christ and Transcendence – April 30, 1944

Regarding this letter, scholars infer that most of Bonhoeffer’s theological thoughts while being incarcerated, can be derived from the following statement:

What might surprise or perhaps even worry you would be my theological thoughts and where they are leading ... I don’t know anyone else with whom I can talk about them and

arrive at some clarity. What keeps gnawing at me is the question, what is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today? The age when we could tell people that with words – whether with theological or with pious words – is past, as is the age of inwardness and conscience ... we are approaching a completely religionless age (DBWE 8:362).

Concerning the assumption that the theme of Bonhoeffer's prison letters can be derived from the April 30, 1944 letter, Barker suggests:

While this has long been recognized as a decisive statement for understanding Bonhoeffer's prison reflections, it must be emphasized that it does not represent a new departure in his thinking; rather, it is the culmination all of his thinking up to this point, bringing to clear expression the driving center of his entire theological enterprise. An example of this can be seen in that long before this question was posed, he raised a similar question in 1928 at the beginning of his career (Barker, 2015:1).

A large concentration of the discussion in this section will be on two aspects of Bonhoeffer's Christology, as found in the letter concerning the 'two natures' of Christ, particularly on the 'being of Christ' and His transcendence. This is the first of a series of theological letters addressed to Eberhard Bethge in which Bonhoeffer asks the questions that kept gnawing at him. The questions were: 'What is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today? What is religionless Christianity, and how can Christ become Lord of the religionless?' (see DBWE 8:362). Bonhoeffer asked these questions within the context of what he calls 'religionless' Christianity.

I will pay particular attention to Bonhoeffer's questions in this letter concerning the 'how' and 'who' questions; 'How can Christ become Lord and who is Christ actually for us today?' that reverberate throughout the prison letters (see DBWE 8:362). The editors to the *Letters and Papers from Prison* propose that this letter evokes questions on which Bonhoeffer continually reflects in his corpus. They suggest that the issue of 'who' concerns transcendence and the question about 'how' concerns the immanent logos of human beings – it is about fallen humanity (see DBWE 12:302). The editors propose that Bonhoeffer's reflection on God's transcendence in his earlier corpus suggests continuity from his earlier to posthumous writings.

If I adopt this assumption of the editors as accurate, a crucial question remains, namely whether continuity can be found in Bonhoeffer's theological correspondence from prison. The discovery of the prison letters raised suspicions that Bonhoeffer's theology was revealing discontinuity from his previous works, which prompted the augmentation of the 'death of God'

theory and secular theology in scholarship. The following questions all depict some disillusionment in Bonhoeffer's theology: 'What is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today? What is religionless Christianity, and how can Christ become Lord of the religionless? The questions then remain: How does his disillusionment influence Bonhoeffer's theology? Does his Christology on the 'two natures' of Christ change because of his emphasis on the shift of God's becoming human in Jesus Christ, thus causing him to coin the phrase 'religionless' Christianity? If God becomes human, what happens to His transcendence?

Bethge, the conservator of continuity in Bonhoeffer's theology, downplays interpreters that allege that one can find only discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's corpus. Although this might be true, most Bonhoeffer scholars would not agree that there is only continuity in Bonhoeffer's theology. Some discontinuity does surface, particularly when Bonhoeffer is disillusioned with the church's tolerance of injustices perpetrated by the Nazi regime; and because of the reality of the war. New issues are the probability that Bonhoeffer would emphasise a different aspect of transcendence by saying that God's presence is to be found in the world, not just transcendentally. God became human in Jesus Christ because the humanity of God is God's most fundamental characteristic, and therefore, the transcendence does not matter.

Given this impression that Bonhoeffer uses the aspect of transcendence to reinterpret what is immanent, I infer that Bonhoeffer does not abandon his earlier theological paradigms but presents a different perspective on God's transcendence in response to the current political situation and the church's response to it. For Bonhoeffer, transcendence is what guards us against worldliness and allows us to see God and the world in a new light, instead of seeing God as just another name for the world. Bonhoeffer's theological formulation did not evolve only from life experiences, particularly his involvement in the Abwehr, but also from new theological processing while being incarcerated.

At this juncture, I return to Bonhoeffer's questions related to transcendence in this letter about the 'how' and 'who' questions: 'How can Christ become Lord?' and 'Who is Christ actually for us today?' For Bonhoeffer, the 'how' question is about the existence of Jesus and How He can exist. The 'how' question is the question the devil would ask. The question of 'how' leads

to the question of existence, which becomes the question of the being of transcendence, of the 'who' (see DBWE 12:302-303). These questions provided Bonhoeffer with the framework to construct a new way of existing as the *ekklesia* that he develops in his prison correspondence. They allowed him not only to express his concern for the church but also to ask the nagging questions: How will the life of the church community continue after the collapse of Nazism? How is Christ going to become Lord in the church community? And: Who is Jesus Christ for us, the church community today?

This letter reveals that Bonhoeffer was particularly concerned that the notion of revelation was properly understood⁸⁵ and interpreted in Christianity. Bonhoeffer directs his rhetoric against Barth's ideas on 'revelation', that is, 'revelation' in terms of person, that God in the incarnation enters into history. God's presence in history is found in the person of Jesus Christ. On a handwritten Tegel note 12 (*NL*, A 86), Bonhoeffer noted "[for] Barth, revelation is only religion; [which is] inconsistent" (see DBWE 8:364[16]). Bonhoeffer defends his view on revelation against Barth's, who hypothesised that God does not want to be transcendent (an idea expressed in Barth's 'positivism of revelation'). This is not so with Bonhoeffer, for Bonhoeffer God is, He exists, at the centre of the earth. "God is not at the boundaries of our life but the centre" (see DBWE 3:86). Bonhoeffer believed that,

There where the boundary stands, there stands also the tree of life, that is, the very God that gives life. God is at once the boundary and the centre of our existence (see DBWE 3:86).

Godsey (2015:253) purports that,

Bonhoeffer's objection to Barth's theology is that in the place of religion there appears a 'positivist doctrine of revelation' which says in effect that everything (virgin birth, Trinity, etc.) must be swallowed as a whole or not at all. Bonhoeffer does not believe that this accords with the Bible, where there are 'degrees of perception and degrees of significance.' A 'positivism of revelation' which sets up a 'law of faith' and says, 'Take it or leave it,' makes it too easy for itself, for the world is left to go its own way, and that is all wrong.

According to Godsey's rationale, he believed, Bonhoeffer thought that Barth had some limitations in his theology, that is, "that he has given no concrete guidance on the 'nonreligious

⁸⁵ See Michael P. DeJonge's book *Bonhoeffer's Theological Formation: Berlin Barth, and Protestant Theology*, particularly Chapter Four, *God is Not Subject but Person: Bonhoeffer's Alternative to Barth* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012)

interpretation of theological concepts” (see Godsey (2015:253). He proceeds by saying that,

Bonhoeffer thinks that he [Barth] misconstrued it [interpretation of theological concepts] in light of liberal theology, reverting to the typical reduction process whereby Christianity is reduced to its ‘essence’ by stripping off its ‘mythological elements.’ But for Bonhoeffer, it is not the mythological concepts that are problematic, but the ‘religious’ ones (see Godsey (2015:253).

In discussing Barth’s ‘positivist doctrine of revelation’ and advancing a “reversal of positions,” Pangritz (2018:60) remarks that,

There is something that has escaped those who, without much ado, made Bonhoeffer’s later charge of ‘positivism of revelation’ against Barth part of the confessional controversy between Lutheran and Calvinist

However, Pangritz remarks:

Thus, at a certain time Bonhoeffer began to dread the consequences of his own Lutheran origins. One may, therefore, wonder whether it is really true that during the church struggle Bonhoeffer distanced himself theologically from Barth (Pangritz 2018:60).

In a letter to Bethge dated May 29, 1944, Bonhoeffer enforces the idea that God exists at the centre of our lives, by expressly saying:

God wants to be recognised in the midst of our lives [and] the ground for this lies in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. God is the centre of life (DBWE 8:406).

Consequently, for Bonhoeffer, we cannot have a shared consciousness with God; God is transcendent; that is, He is beyond our ability to know Him. Bonhoeffer insists that “God is the beyond in the midst of lives [and] the church stands not at a point where human powers fail, at the boundaries” (see DBWE 8:367). At this point, by recognising God as the centre of life, Bonhoeffer concludes the ‘who’ question of the ‘being of transcendence’ as discussed in his *Christology* lectures, that is, ‘Who’ Christ is, is known solely based on his works (see DBWE 12:308). The revelation of God in Christ allows Christ to become the human for others as both human and divine.

For Bonhoeffer, transcendence is never identified with empirical human reality. The reality of God is always realised in the revelation of Christ, the transcendent one. Since Germany had lost the idea of who Christ was, the ‘human for others’, and replaced Him with other-worldliness, the transcendent consequentially disappeared from their reality. Bonhoeffer implies that God has vanished from their (the Church in Germany’s) midst. If understood like

this, Bonhoeffer's explanation of transcendence in *Letters and Papers from Prison* depicts a clear perception that he viewed transcendence from a new theological perspective, that God is still the beyond in the midst of our lives and revealed as Christ, the 'human for others.'

In dealing with the phrase, 'Jesus Christ as the human for others' and alternatively expounding on the phrase 'who is Jesus Christ for us Today?' Phillips points out the likelihood that,

The Christology of the prison letters concentrates on the person and work of Christ and sets aside for the moment – permanently, as fate was to decide – any consideration of the church as the *body of Christ*. We find ourselves back in the realm of the *theologia crucis*, of the humiliated Christ, and the Lutheran Christology of condescension (Phillips 1967:193).

Phillips felt confident that "there is good evidence for this view of the development of Bonhoeffer's Christology in the prison letters and in his determination to demonstrate that revelation is concrete, graspable and haveable in Christ" (see Phillips 1967:194).

The salient questions are interrelated for Bonhoeffer, and both lead to the Christ who revealed himself as the Word of God, the Logos of God, that the church receives anew every day. Jesus lives in the church community as both human and divine. Undoubtedly, for Bonhoeffer, Christology is that the God-human is present. That presence in the church community compels the statement that Jesus is wholly human and wholly divine, or else He would not be present. This particular area, the 'being of transcendence' dealt with above, leads to the conclusion that in this letter, Bonhoeffer framed the idea of 'transcendence' around the concept, 'who Jesus Christ is for us today.'

Following this letter (dated May 29, 1944), Bonhoeffer further explores the idea of the 'being of transcendence' and how to appropriate the experience of transcendence, in notes written to Bethge (I, II, Tegel, end of June 1944). These handwritten notes consist of references and quotations from Otto Walter Friedrich's *Homeric [Greek] Gods* with regards to the 'being of transcendence.' Homer proclaimed the following: "'God' is not a perceivable unity, i.e., the gods are dependent from one another;⁸⁶ 'the human being,' not an animal, i.e., the animal form

⁸⁶ See editor's note [11]. That is, that gods are not independent of one another and are unfathomable (DBWE 8:437).

is unspiritual, and the human form carries some form of spirituality;⁸⁷ and ‘the perfect human form’ stands before us”⁸⁸ (see DBWE8:437). The editors propose that “the goal and the purpose of the Greeks were designed to make the human-divine and not to make divinity human” – this is theomorphism (see editor’s note [4] (DBWE 8:438), which Bonhoeffer rejects outright. Later, in his notes to Bethge (I, Tegel, July-August 1944), Bonhoeffer asserts that,

... the expulsion of God from the world is the discrediting of religion living without God [and yet] Christianity [can only] arise out of the encounter with a concrete human being: Jesus – the perfect human form. [This is the] experience of transcendence (DBWE 8:490).

Bonhoeffer implied that if God is expelled from the world, then religion is discredited and be equated as living without Christianity is only conceivable (‘arise’) in the church community through an encounter with a concrete human being Jesus Christ, who exists in a perfect human form. This experience with the transcendence, Bonhoeffer maintains, is with the God-human who exists as both human and divine. I infer that Bonhoeffer’s formulations in these notes all point to his views on the ‘two natures’ of Christ.

The above inference I derive from Bonhoeffer’s concluding notes on the ‘being of transcendence’ found in an outline to a book he shared with Eberhard Bethge, circa August 3, 1944, which I will discuss briefly. The topic ‘Who is God?’ becomes central to Bonhoeffer’s thinking in this proposed book, which deals with the theme of transcendence. Bonhoeffer’s concern is not to discuss a general belief in God, which in his view was only a “prolongation of a piece of the world” (see DBWE 8:501). He concluded that faith in God is an encounter with Jesus Christ; that is, Jesus’ ‘being-for-others’ is the experience of transcendence (see DBWE 8:501). What follows below is an extract from the (proposed) book to Bethge in which Bonhoeffer explains Jesus’ ‘being-for-others’:

Jesus’s ‘being-for-others’ is the experience of transcendence! Only through this liberation from the self, through this ‘being-for-others,’ unto death, do omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence come into being. Faith is participating in this being of Jesus (Becoming human [*Menschwerdung*], cross, resurrection). Our relationship with God is no religious relationship to the best being possible – that is no genuine

⁸⁷ See editor’s note [13, 16]. The revelation in animal form still testifies to an unspiritual divinity of the human form, on the other hand, proclaims a divine nature that becomes perfect in spirit (DBWE 8:437).

⁸⁸ For further explanation, see the editor's note [18] (DBWE 8:437).

transcendence. Instead, our relationship to God is a new life in ‘being there for others,’ through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendent is not the infinite, unattainable tasks, but the neighbour within reach in any given situation. God in human form! Not in oriental religious animal form, and not in the conceptual forms of the absolute, metaphysical, the infinite, nor again the Greek god-human form of the ‘God-human form [*Gott-Menschgestalt*] of the human being in itself’ [Bonhoeffer’s reference to Otto’s book ‘*The Homeric Gods*’]. But rather ‘the human being for others’ therefore the Crucified One. The human being living out the transcendent (DBWE 8:501).

Garnering from the above extract, Bonhoeffer presumes perfect agreement between Jesus’ ‘being there for others’ and His transcendence. The attributes ascribed to Jesus by Bonhoeffer in this extract affirms both Jesus’ humanity and divinity; that is, Jesus is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present. Although Jesus was ‘God in human form, as a divine being, through His death, He became the ‘being-for-others.’ This means that in our relationship to the God-human, he not only allows us to participate in His humaneness but also allows us to be associated with his death. This affords us an opportunity in ‘being there for others’ by living only for others and not for ourselves and intimately living out Jesus’ transcendence, that is, “the transcendent is not the infinite, unattainable tasks, but the neighbour within reach in any given situation” (DBWE 8:501). Bethge asserts that these two expressions, ‘Christ is and exists for others’ and ‘Christ being the human for others’, are a “striking formula of course, [that infers] in the prison letters the realm for this Christ is everybody, and here it is thought of as the realm of the church” (see Bethge 1967:35).

With regards to the ideas expressed in the outline of Bonhoeffer’s book Rasmussen suggests that “the phrase ‘Christ being the man for others’ stresses our relationship to the transcendent as a life in ‘being-there-for-others,’ which is participation in the very being of Jesus, ‘the [Mensch] for others’” (see Rasmussen 2014:951). Rasmussen elaborates by saying that the phrases:

‘The transcendent is not the infinite, unattainable task, but the neighbour within reach in any given situation. God in human form!’ [and the phrase] ‘The human being living out of the transcendent’ [and] this-worldly life, a life of ‘Earth and its distress’ as the ‘Christian Song of Songs,’ [are all expressions that convey] a life that experiences transcendent powers [meaning that] the worldly finite bears the infinite (Rasmussen 2014: 951 cf. DBWE 8:501).

How does it become possible to live out both the humanity and divinity of Jesus? For Bonhoeffer, this becomes possible in the church community in which the human and divine

Christ lives, and the church community exists only as a church for others. Bonhoeffer asserts that the first step to this possibility is to “participate in the worldly tasks of life in the church community”; and “see that it does not underestimate the significance of the human ‘example,’ which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus” (see DBWE 8:503).

Robinson agrees that Bonhoeffer’s phrase ‘man for others’ in the outline of his book “has to do with Jesus’ ‘being’ and ‘transcendence’ that climaxes into Jesus’ humanity” (see Robinson 1963:76). Robinson stresses that Jesus is ‘the man for others’: “as the one in whom Love has completely taken over”; and “the one who is utterly open to and united with, the Ground of his being through participation in the Being of God”; and for Bonhoeffer, this is transcendence (see Robinson 1963:76). Robinson affirms that Bonhoeffer holds that Jesus becomes the appropriate human who is made bare in his humanity, meaning that “he became ‘the man for others’ unequivocally, and for that reason only the more truly the proper Man” (see Robinson 1963:77). In the human Christ Jesus “stands revealed, exposed at the surface level of the flesh, the depth, and ground of all our being” (see Robinson 1963:77). Robinson’s rationale is that,

... Jesus bodied forth completely, unconditionally and without a reserve in the life of a man – the man for others and the man for God. He is a perfect man and perfect God – not as a mixture of oil and water, as the embodiment through obedience (Robinson 1963:77).

Robinson’s logic is that Bonhoeffer’s phrase ‘man for others’ climaxes in Jesus’ humanity. If this is true, then it would be accurate to say that Bonhoeffer adhered to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ; throughout his prison correspondence, that remained the same, that is, Jesus is entirely human and perfect divine.

9.5 Bonhoeffer’s ‘theological reflection’ – May 21, 1944

In this personal letter addressed to Bethge, Bonhoeffer counsels him about the danger of pursuing erotic love; because through it, one may lose what he calls the “polyphony⁸⁹ of life” (see DBWE 8:393). What Bonhoeffer meant [by polyphony] was that God, the Eternal, wants to be loved with the whole heart as a sort of *cantus firmus*⁹⁰ and not to the impairment of earthly

⁸⁹ See editor’s note [6.] i.e., with many voices; for example, in music a composition in which several largely independent voices follow their lines.

⁹⁰ See editor’s note [7.] In a polyphonic composition, the primary, steady voice to which the other voices relate.

[erotic] love. During this time of his life, while being incarcerated, Bonhoeffer remained captivated with musical imagery, such as *polyphony* and *cantus firmus*.⁹¹ This idea [*cantus firmus*] Bonhoeffer writes: “only came to me after your [Bethge’s] visit yesterday,” [and] “I wanted to ask you [Bethge] to let the *cantus firmus* be heard clearly in your [Bethge’s] being” (see DBWE 8:394). Bonhoeffer asserts that if Bethge allows this process to transpire, “only then will it sound complete [in Bethge’s life]; and then the counterpart⁹² will always know that it is being carried and can’t get out of tune or be cut adrift while remaining itself completely in itself” (see DBWE 8:394). Bonhoeffer also stresses that “only this polyphony [will] give life and wholeness” to Bethge’s life, and “that no disaster can befall [Bethge] as long as the *cantus firmus* continues” (see DBWE 8:394).

Why was this idea of the ‘*cantus firmus*’ so crucial to Bonhoeffer, and how does it relate to the ‘two natures’ of Jesus Christ? It is essential to Bonhoeffer because this metaphor aptly explains the ‘two natures’ of Christ. Bonhoeffer explains that,

... where the *cantus firmus* is clear and distinct, a counterpart⁹³ can develop as mightily as it wants. The two are ‘undivided and yet distinct,’ as the definition of Chalcedon says, like the divine and human natures in Christ⁹⁴ (DBWE 8:394).

Bonhoeffer’s explanation on the ‘*cantus firmus*’ clearly indicates that he adhered to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ that states,

Jesus Christ was (and is) both divine and human, the same Christ, Son, Lord, recognised in ‘two natures’ without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; and his ‘two natures’ did not ‘mix’ but were joined together in a mysterious, hypostatic union (Chalcedon 451).

Consequently, Bonhoeffer’s following question resounds in unison to the musical imagery of his Christology; he asks:

Is that perhaps why we are so at home with polyphony in music, why it is important to us because it is the musical image of this Christological fact and thus also our *vita*

⁹¹ Bonhoeffer repeats this in his next letter to Eberhard Bethge dated May 21, 1944 (page 396) and is concerned that Bethge did not understand the complete meaning of it in a letter dated May 27, 1944 (page 404).

⁹² The counterpart is an independent melodic line to the *cantus firmus*.

⁹³ The counterpart is an independent melodic line to the *cantus firmus* and this instance Bonhoeffer references it to God and Jesus existing in unity, which in effect gives credence to the definition of Chalcedon regarding the ‘two natures’ of Christ who is able to exist as both human and divine.

⁹⁴ I discuss this in Chapter Three. Ernst Feil also deals with Bonhoeffer’s Chalcedon Christology in his book, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (1985).

Christiana? [Christian life] (DBWE 8:394).

In discussing the Christological framework of this letter, Harvey proposes that this letter to Bethge may connote:

The characteristic way that Bonhoeffer locates our desire for God and our fellow creatures in this passage within a Christological framework is, of course, unmistakable. But his consistent emphasis on the *promieity* of God in Christ, that is, on the mystery of God's messianic suffering [vicarious representation], needs to be understood in terms of its corporeality (Harvey 1997:334).

Harvey's phrase "the *promieity*⁹⁵ of God in Christ" can be best described as regarding Christ's nature of existing for us, interrelated to these ideas. First, that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human, and Jesus Christ is not free from human beings but free for human beings – Christ is *pro-me*. However, Marsh cautions that,

... God's *promieity* ought not to be understood as an effect emanating from him, nor as an accident, but as the essence, the being of the personal God himself. God's being there is always a being-there for the world (Marsh 1994:128).

In this letter, it becomes apparent that Bonhoeffer adheres to the Chalcedonian formulation of the 'two natures' of Christ – the idea of God becoming fully human. Bonhoeffer maintains his adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation, and illustrates it with musical imagery, viz., the *polyphony* of life and the *cantus firmus*. This imagery in music denotes one pre-existent melody consisting of several independent voices or parts that for Bonhoeffer is a similitude to the 'two natures' of Christ. Harvey remarks that,

... The characteristic way that Bonhoeffer locates our desire for God and our fellow creatures in this passage [letter] within a Christological framework is, of course, unmistakable (Harvey 1997:334).

9.6 The Humanity of God – July 21, 1944

In this letter, it is possible to trace Bonhoeffer's Christology specifically on Jesus Christ's humanity; and how Christians share in Christ's humanity. He articulates this as 'this-worldliness of Christianity,'⁹⁶ resumed from previous communication with Bethge (see DBWE 8:485).

Wüstenberg observes that when Bonhoeffer talks about 'this-worldliness' of Christianity,

⁹⁵ It is assumed in scholarship that the word 'promieity' is perhaps derived from the Latin *pro me* meaning for me.

⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer first formulated this idea of 'worldliness' in *Discipleship* and *Ethics*.

... we observe again that Bonhoeffer is not reflecting on a mere understanding of this-worldliness, qualifying the historicism with the concept of life, he is concerned with living in this world [and] the concept of life is determined Christologically; in the light of revelation [revelation of God through Christ] and life is defined through Jesus Christ (Wüstenberg 2008:11-12).

Bonhoeffer held that the profundity of ‘this-worldliness of Christianity’ shows that there is no significant difference between our humanity and the humanity of Jesus (see DBWE 8:485). In effect, “the Christian is not a *homo religiosus* but simply a human being, in the same way, Jesus was a human being” (see DBWE 8:485). The profundity of ‘this-worldliness of Christianity’ is not an ordinary this-worldliness “but the profound this-worldliness that shows discipline and includes and the ever-present knowledge” of Jesus Christ’s “death and resurrection” as a human (see DBWE 8:485). Jesus existed as a human being; therefore, He could relate to the human condition. The value of life (this-worldliness) becomes meaningful, Bonhoeffer stresses,

... if one has completely renounced making something of oneself [and] one throws oneself completely into the arms of God, ... this is what I call this-worldliness: living fully in the midst of life (DBWE 8:486).

For Bonhoeffer living one’s life to its fullest extent includes renouncing one’s successes and failures, experiences, and perplexities by embracing them to the extent that one no longer takes these experiences seriously, and that,

... one takes seriously no longer one’s sufferings but rather the suffering of God in the world. Then one stays awake with Christ.⁹⁷ And this is how one becomes a human being, a Christian, [and understands the humanity of Jesus] (DBWE 8:486).

It can be reasonably assumed that Bonhoeffer believed that when one suffers as Christ did in this world, “one becomes a human being, a Christian,”; and our suffering is related to the humanity of Christ because we share in (His humanity) by being a Christian. Bonhoeffer relates to suffering because he “himself acted vicariously [while being incarcerated] in anonymity and silence, and it is precisely this which enabled him to speak loudly” to the church about sharing in Christ’s suffering (see Bethge 1967:82). The tenor of this letter is related to Bonhoeffer’s trepidation while being incarcerated; one can assume that he embraced his pain as sharing in God’s suffering. Bonhoeffer acknowledges:

I am grateful that I have been allowed this insight, and I know that it is only on the path that I have finally taken that I was able to learn this. May God lead us kindly through

⁹⁷ Here Bonhoeffer refers to the disciples who fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:40).

these times, but above all, may God lead us to himself (DBWE 8:486).

The contemplative ideas and intuitions about the past and the present condition of Christianity allowed Bonhoeffer to look at his humanity and place it into God's hands. Not surprisingly, he questioned:

How should one become arrogant over successes or shaken by one's failures when one shares in God's suffering in the life of this world? (DBWE 8:486).

The expressions in this letter: 'Jesus was a human being'; 'the ever-present knowledge of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection'; 'and living fully [suffering] in the midst of life'; and by suffering 'one becomes a human being, a Christian' are all interrelated to Bonhoeffer's adherence to the Chalcedonian formulations of the nature of Christ. Bonhoeffer uses these expressions to explain the relationship that exists between the humanity of Jesus and humans, and what they share in common, i.e., suffering. These expressions are also related to Bonhoeffer's idea of the 'vicarious representation' of Jesus Christ, viz., the God who became human and participated in the suffering of humanity. This idea echoes his earlier writings. These experiences in Christian life all become encounters with the transcendent. In his Notes, I, Tegel, July-August, Bonhoeffer confirms that,

Christianity arises out of the encounter with a concrete human being: Jesus. This becomes the experience of transcendence (DBWE 8:490).

9.7 Bonhoeffer's poem 'Who am I' and related Christological letters

I now turn my attention to further Christological prison correspondence, of which the first is an undated handwritten letter [*NL*, A, 80,180] to Bethge (dated by Bethge in this edition of *Letters and Papers from Prison* as June 2, 1944). In this letter, Bonhoeffer mentions that he intended to write to Bethge about the Song of Solomon⁹⁸; he says: "I would read it as a song about earthly love," but if understood correctly, it would offer the best Christological interpretation. Bonhoeffer never got to write this letter (DBWE 8:410).

Turning now to Bonhoeffer's poem 'Who am I' written in July 1944. Wannenwetsch (2009:4) in discussing Bonhoeffer's 'prison' poetry acclaims that Bonhoeffer's poetry differs from

⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer also comments on The Song of Solomon in his letter May 20, 1944, 3/17:394 in relation to our love towards God ... "who wants to be loved with our whole heart, not to the detriment of earthly love or to diminish it, but as a sort of *cantus firmus* to which the other voices of life resound in counterpart".

“Germanic, heavy laden [poetry], and [the] conceptual language of his prose is stark; the poems prove a useful lens through which the concepts can be visualized in sharper contours”. In this sense, Wannenwetsch infers that

there is much in Bonhoeffer’s case [poetry] that suggests a peculiar suitability. The orchestrated nature of poetic language seems a particularly appropriate medium to capture the complexity of Bonhoeffer’s theological thought whose richness in overtones is more reminiscent of musical cohesion than that of architecture (Wannenwetsch 2009:5).

In his analysis of the poem ‘*Who am I?*’: *Human Identity and the Spiritual Disciplines in the Witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* Northcott (2009:15-16) critiques, Wannenwetsch post-liberal approach to the poem, who,

... enlists Bonhoeffer, and in this poem, in the post-liberal attempt to recover the moral self through the public worship and politics of the body of Christ. He [Wannenwetsch] suggests that Bonhoeffer’s rejection of inwardness, and the pattern the poem evidences of lament and praise, reflects his ‘hearing’ of the Word in public worship. The claim is that Bonhoeffer sees Christian identity as intrinsically social and as arising from the invocation of God in the public life of the worshipping community.

In Northcott’s (2009:16-17) study of this poem, he affirms that,

However, the account of the poem as critiquing the modern quest for the authentic self is hard to sustain given that this poem could only have been written by someone who had a deep sense of the importance of human interiority for personal identity, and who engaged in self-analysis.

Northcott (2009:19) purports that,

... this spiritual breakthrough’ of discovering his true self ‘through community’ is part of what Bethge describes as Bonhoeffer’s ‘conversion to Jesus Christ’ in the 1930s and is evidenced in the poem ‘Who Am I?’ Reconciliation is not then for Bonhoeffer an ideal in history or a possibility of human consciousness realized by the principle of Incarnation. Rather the possibility of the reconciled self is tied to the empirical reality of the sanctified community.

In his analysis of Bonhoeffer’s poem ‘Who am I?’ Rosner (2005) implies that this poem was “written as a kind of self-analysis in 1944, the year before Bonhoeffer’s execution; [and] the question of the title [‘Who am I?’] occurs five times in the body” (see Rosner 2005:348). The reason for the logic as mentioned earlier, Rosner believes is that the “opening three stanzas report pictures of Bonhoeffer reflected in the views of others, namely the guards by using short lines which evoke the confined atmosphere of his prison cell” (see Rosner 2005:348). For Ross, this poem reflects “Bonhoeffer’s view of himself is a less positive and more anguished picture,

as he struggles under ghastly circumstances” (see Rosner 2005:348). Despite this, Rosner (2005:349). concludes that,

In Bonhoeffer’s case, this realization is anything but academic. It is uttered in the midst of intense longing, confusion and suffering. Like an Old Testament psalm of lament, the poem includes ‘the sustained interrogative, the optative yearning, the imperative responsibilities [but closes with] the final vocative of faith.’ In short, ‘*Du kennst mich*’ brings light to Bonhoeffer’s dark night of despair.

In short, Rosner formulates Bonhoeffer’s ‘self-realization’ in the following way by suggesting that “a concept as fundamental as being known by God may be susceptible to more than one definition” (see Rosner 2005:350). In this case, given Bonhoeffer’s circumstances that “even if ‘belonging to God’ is an appropriate paraphrase of being known by God, it does not explain the sense in which God ‘knows’ those who are his” (see Rosner 2005:350).

In support Rosner, as mentioned above, believed Bonhoeffer’s book *Life Together* might help us understand Bonhoeffer’s ruminating. Rosner asserts, that in *Life Together* “Bonhoeffer considers Christian community in Christological terms: ‘Because Christ stands between me and an other, I must not long for unmediated community with that person” (see Rosner 2005:350). Rosner purports that Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* implied that,

‘Christ between me and an other’ means that others should encounter me only as the persons they already are for Christ ... Spiritual love recognises the true image of the other person as seen from the perspective of Jesus Christ. It is the image Jesus Christ has formed and wants to form in all people (see Rosner 2005:350).

However, for Bonhoeffer, the image of God in Christ is critical not only for how Christians relate to each other, but also for an individual Christian’s perception of him- or herself (see Rosner 2005:350).

Also, interesting to note in this poem is a play on the word ‘who’ in the poem that could relate to Bonhoeffer’s idea on the ‘being of transcendence,’ a concept developed in his earlier *Christology*, discussed in detail in this chapter. In *Christology* lectures, the ‘who’ question is about the ‘being of transcendence’ and who God is in his humanity. For Bonhoeffer, God is one “who became human as we became human, he is completely human,”; and we can say of “this human being, Jesus Christ, that he is God” (see DBWE 12:353). In this poem, I assume

circumstances were constantly changing during his incarceration, the content of his prison letters constantly accordingly, in mood, tenor, and replies directed to different audiences.¹⁰¹ To piece together Bonhoeffer's prison letters, theology is virtually unworkable, which is rendered more compelling by signature phrases such as 'a world come of age,' 'the religious à priori,' and 'religionless Christianity.' These phrases have elicited more debate than any other aspect of Bonhoeffer's theology.

In secondary literature, the concentration given to these phrases has caused scholars occasionally to overlook Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, which might have shed more light on Bonhoeffer's acuity to the 'two natures' of Christ. To find a consistent trend of thought, Bonhoeffer's most relevant phrases on Christology have to be grouped, and his theological reflections in the prison letters aligned with his Christology. This has to be done to fashion a coherent Christology on Jesus Christ's 'two natures'. The most common phrase or question found in the prison letters is: 'Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?' When Bonhoeffer uses this phrase, it represents the new theology of the prison letters, in which he regards Jesus Christ as the starting point or the place where humanity can recognise God and Jesus Christ taking hold of us in the midst and the centre of our lives. This new theology, 'Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today in a world come of age?' was presented and addressed only to Eberhard Bethge. In this new theology, Bonhoeffer presents his Christological and theological outlook (thinking while being incarcerated) as to 'what Christianity is' or 'what Christianity is for us today.' For Bonhoeffer, Christianity always arises from the encounter with a concrete human being, Jesus Christ, and this becomes the Christian's experience with transcendence. Bonhoeffer's question remains constant: How does this idea of transcendence translate into ecclesiology and Christology for us today? For Bonhoeffer, the church is the church (ecclesiology) only when it is there for others. Furthermore, as a first step, the church needs to exercise benevolence toward the needy. The church must participate in the practical tasks of life in the community by helping and serving. The church community must tell people

¹⁰¹ This becomes evident because of Bonhoeffer's hopeful expectation to be released from prison. His optimism even gave Bonhoeffer the diligence to prepare an outline for a new book he was hoping to complete, possibly after his release.

