

# Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the resistance, and the two kingdoms

Charles E. Ford

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## Introduction

The theology of Martin Luther is alien to contemporary American thought. This became apparent to Dietrich Bonhoeffer during his visit to Union Seminary in New York in 1930-31.<sup>1</sup> Among the most criticized aspects of Luther's thought is his 'two kingdoms teaching', on the relationship between the church and the state. Bonhoeffer was profoundly influenced by Luther<sup>2</sup> and would remain so throughout his life. This paper will discuss how Bonhoeffer used Luther's two kingdoms teaching in his theological and political opposition to National Socialism.

The Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth had, after Luther, perhaps the greatest influence on Bonhoeffer.<sup>3</sup> Barth was the preeminent critic of modernity and a champion of a return to reformation and biblical thought. Nevertheless he had developed a very negative assessment of Luther.<sup>4</sup> In December 1939, shortly after the outbreak of World War II in Europe, Barth wrote<sup>5</sup>

the German people suffer from the heritage of a paganism that is mystical and that is in consequence unrestrained, unwise and illusory. And it suffers, too, from the heritage of the greatest Christian of Germany, from Martin Luther's error on the relation between Law and Gospel, between the temporal and the spiritual order and power. This error has established, confirmed and idealized the natural paganism of the German people, instead of limiting and restraining it. . . . Hitlerism is the present evil dream of the German pagan who first became christianized in a Lutheran form.

In spite of this, Barth remained extremely important to Bonhoeffer, both personally and theologically, a fact that Barth apparently did not appreciate until long after Bonhoeffer's death.<sup>6</sup> It is equally true that Bonhoeffer always retained his independence from Barth and his ideas eventually developed in directions quite different from Barth's. In fact, as we shall discuss later, Barth opposed the most significant decision of Bonhoeffer's life, to join the political resistance to the Nazis.

Bonhoeffer's close association with Barth and Barth's antipathy to Luther have undoubtedly caused some distortion in interpreting Bonhoeffer. For example, in a recent article<sup>7</sup> Joseph Robinson asserted that Bonhoeffer "was persuaded by Karl Barth's argument that the implications of faith are profoundly 'worldly' as opposed to 'other-worldly'." The actual situation is just the reverse. Bonhoeffer had already learned this from Luther, and criticized Barth for making God too distant from the world.<sup>8</sup> It was in fact Bonhoeffer who, appealing to Luther, pressed Barth on the 'concrete', 'this-worldly' nature of Christianity.

Robinson made mention of Bonhoeffer's attraction to the emotional power of the black church and his interest in the emphasis on social action at Union Seminary. In the context of his article, however, these statements obscure as much as they reveal. What was important to Bonhoeffer about the black church was "that here the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the saviour of sinners, is really preached and accepted with great welcome and visible emotion."<sup>9</sup> It was precisely this failure to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ that made Bonhoeffer so critical of the "social action" emphasis at Union.<sup>10</sup> Although he certainly appreciated the commitment of those involved, he was also sharply critical.<sup>11</sup>

A seminary in which it can come about that a large number of students laugh out loud in a public lecture at the quoting of a passage from Luther's "On the Bondage of the Will" on sin and forgiveness because it seems to them to be comic has evidently completely forgotten what Christian theology by its very nature stands for.

Finally it is inappropriate for Robinson to describe the Confessing Church as "Protestant" and its opponents as "Lutheran." Lutherans were on both sides just as much as other Protestants.

One of the most distorted portrayals of Luther comes from the Lutheran pastor Paul P. Kuenning. In describing Luther's confrontation with Thomas Muentzer, he painted Luther as fanatical and violent and Muentzer as sober and serious.<sup>12</sup> Precisely the opposite is the case.<sup>13</sup> His latest tack is an attempt to use Bonhoeffer to discredit Luther, claiming<sup>14</sup> that Bonhoeffer's writings about "worldly Christianity" constitute a "devastating attack" upon Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms. This is nonsense. Bonhoeffer attributed his understanding of "the profound this-worldly nature of Christianity" specifically to Luther.<sup>15</sup>

Edwin H. Robertson has written one of the shortest and best summaries of Bonhoeffer's thought and life. He described very well the contrast between Bonhoeffer and Barth. "Bonhoeffer had learnt much from Barth, but it is important to realise that from the beginning, he disagreed with him on the subject of ethics." Robertson described the long discussion Bonhoeffer had with Barth about this shortly after his return from America in 1931.<sup>16</sup> Neither man budged. Robertson continued<sup>17</sup>

The ethics of Bonhoeffer differ radically from those of Barth. The closeness of these two theologians in many other respects can lead to confusion here. Barth almost deduces the ethics of socialism from the New Testament. Bonhoeffer will never admit that the ethical task of the state can be deduced from an exegesis of the Bible. Barth can talk of 'the moulding of the state into the likeness of the kingdom of God' and this is totally foreign to the freedom of decision in the eyes of God that Bonhoeffer had worked out as early as the Barcelona lecture [of 8 February 1929].

Robertson offered the following summary<sup>18</sup> which is a paraphrase from Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*.<sup>19</sup>

Luther had protested against Christianity in the form of the church becoming independent and he had protested with the help of the secular in the name of a better Christianity! Bonhoeffer, always believing that he was fighting the same battles as Luther fought, saw Christianity being used as a polemical weapon against the secular. He then protested in the name of a better 'secular'. He opposed any attempt to go back to the idea of the dominance of the spiritual as an end in itself. Luther's doctrine of the two realms, which caused the Germans so much trouble in dealing with the state, was not rejected but re-emphasized by Bonhoeffer.

This summarizes nicely the theme of this paper. It also raises an interesting question. Where did Bonhoeffer see Christianity being used as a polemical weapon against the secular? We return to this briefly at the end of the paper.

### The Aryan Clause

This paper will discuss two situations in which Bonhoeffer used the two kingdoms teaching. The first is his response to the 'Aryan Clause'. This refers to the laws of April 1933 excluding Jews from the civil service. Anticipating the eventual application of these laws to the Church, which would result in the dismissal of pastors of Jewish origin, Bonhoeffer drafted an immediate response.<sup>20</sup> He began by asserting forcefully that aspect of the two kingdoms teaching which has caused the most criticism, namely that in general the church does not question the actions

of the state.

Without doubt, the Church of the Reformation has no right to address the state directly in its specifically political actions. It has neither to praise nor to censure the laws of the state, but must rather affirm the state to be God's order of preservation in a godless world; it has to recognise the state's ordinances, good or bad as they appear from a humanitarian point of view, and to understand that they are based on the sustaining will of God amidst the chaotic godlessness of the world. This view of the state's action on the part of the church is far removed beyond any form of moralism and is distinct from humanitarianism of any shade through the radical nature of the gulf between the standpoint of the Gospel and the standpoint of the Law. The action of the state remains free from the church's intervention. There are no piqued or pedantic comments from the church here.

Why did Bonhoeffer disavow any moralizing approach of the church to the Nazi state? Precisely to focus on the exceptional situation in which the church is to approach the state, namely when state action threatens its own legitimacy.

The true church of Christ ... can and should, precisely because it does not moralize in individual instances, continually ask the state whether its action can be justified as legitimate action of the state ... It will have to put this question quite clearly today in the matter of the Jewish question.

Bonhoeffer then outlined the situation in which state action would be illegitimate, namely when "the state develops its power to such an extent that it deprives Christian preaching and Christian faith of their rights." "The church must reject this encroachment ... " What shall the church do in this situation?

it can aid the victims of state action. The Church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community.

Bonhoeffer asserted that such action is, in reality, already incumbent upon the church. It is in fact "the compelling demand of the hour." But Bonhoeffer went further. The church may be called

not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself [that is, disrupt the vehicle]. Such action would be direct political action, and is only possible and demanded when the church sees the state fail in its function ... *e.g.* in the forced exclusion of baptised Jews from our Christian congregations or in the prohibition of our mission to the Jews. Here the Christian church would find itself in *statu confessionis* and here the state would be in the act of negating itself.

Bonhoeffer continued this theme. "The church cannot allow its actions towards its members to be prescribed by the state. The baptised Jew is a member of our church." Thus the question is not ultimately about Jews but about Christians.

What is at stake is by no means the question whether our German members of congregations can still tolerate church fellowship with the Jews. It is rather the task of Christian preaching to say: here is the church, where Jew and German stand together under the Word of God: here is the proof whether a church is still the church or not.

Thus has Bonhoeffer eschewed for the church any moralizing approaches to the state, in order to focus on the exceptional situation – in this case the most important exceptional situation perhaps in the entire history of the church – when the church must speak to the state, to prevent not only the state, but also the church, from negating itself.

Any action to “put a spoke in the wheel” would require a church decision.

The necessity of direct political action by the church is, on the other hand, to be decided at any time by an ‘Evangelical Council’ and cannot therefore ever be casuistically decided beforehand.

Here Bonhoeffer returned again to the question of ethics which occupied him for his entire career. As he had already written in 1929, “The nature of the will of God can only be clear in the moment of action.”<sup>21</sup> He was anticipating the possibility that some church ‘Council’ might make a concrete decision. “It is impossible to say where it will lead us,” he wrote.<sup>22</sup> It is clear that he wanted such a decision. Indeed for the next several months he pressed for some decisive action on this question.

### The Bethel Confession

In fact nothing came of Bonhoeffer’s April draft. In August 1933 he had the opportunity to engage in a much more comprehensive writing project. At the Evangelical center at Bethel, Bonhoeffer, Hermann Sasse and others came together to work on a confession of faith. The results pleased both men.<sup>23</sup> Bonhoeffer expressed his urgency about the issue as follows “The real question is between Germanism and Christianity, and the sooner the conflict comes out into the open the better. Nothing could be more dangerous than its concealment . . .”

Klaus Scholder, an historian of the church struggle, described the confession in the following terms<sup>24</sup> “the Bethel confession remains a brilliant, sharp and impressive witness . . . theologically clearer and more exact in some passages than the famous Barmen declaration of May 1934.” Especially important was a section on “the Church and the Jews,” which had been written by Wilhelm Vischer. Bonhoeffer was particularly pleased with this section, which ends with<sup>25</sup>

It is the task of the Christians who come from the Gentile world to expose themselves to persecution rather than to surrender, willingly or unwillingly, even in one single respect, their brotherhood with Jewish Christians in the church, founded on Word and Sacrament.

Scholder wrote of this sentence<sup>26</sup> “In the many contributions to this question in 1933, nowhere else was the demand for the irrevocable communion of all Christians so clearly expressed as here.” The question of the Jews is raised in other parts of the confession as well.<sup>27</sup> The Bethel confession has a pronounced Lutheran emphasis, including many quotes from the Lutheran confessions. This was due as much to Bonhoeffer as to the more experienced Sasse.<sup>28</sup>

Immediately after this, during the first week of September, Nazi sympathizers took power in the Church of the Old Prussian Union and implemented the Aryan Clause. Bonhoeffer made an impassioned plea for widespread resignations by pastors from their offices. He even sent a telegram to a leader in the ecumenical movement abroad stating that a split in the church was immanent. The response from the church, however, was disappointing. Few were prepared to take such decisive action.<sup>29</sup> Over the next few months the Bethel Confession was to be watered down to such an extent that Bonhoeffer would reject the final draft.<sup>30</sup>

Bonhoeffer wrote immediately to both Sasse and Barth. Both shared his view of the seriousness of the situation but both counseled waiting.<sup>31</sup> To Barth he wrote<sup>32</sup>

In your booklet you said that where a church adopted the Aryan Clauses it would cease to be a Christian church. A considerable number of pastors here would agree with you in this view. Now the expected has happened, and I am therefore asking you on behalf of many friends, pastors and students, to let us know whether you feel that it is possible either to remain in a church which has ceased to be a Christian church or to continue to exercise a ministry which

has become a privilege for Aryans.

Barth responded<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the damnable doctrine which now holds sway in the church must first find vent in other, worse deviations and corruptions; . . . It could then well be that the encounter might take place at a still more central point.

Bonhoeffer was disappointed.<sup>34</sup> He saw the Aryan Clause as the central point and wanted decisive action from the church on it.

A month later, after Barth had read the Bethel Confession, he questioned the appropriateness of so Lutheran a document, and recommended that it be reworked to make it more Protestant.<sup>35</sup> Although much shorter, the Barmen declaration of May 1934, written essentially by Barth, was such a document. It had such a strong Reformed character, however, that many Lutherans, including Sasse, refused to sign it. Bonhoeffer enthusiastically embraced it.<sup>36</sup> However he was disappointed that in it no mention was made of the exclusion of Jews. According to Scholder this was a specific weakness of Barth's approach.<sup>37</sup>

In 1967, Barth acknowledged this in a letter to Eberhard Bethge after receiving a copy of his biography of Bonhoeffer.<sup>38</sup>

Especially new to me was the fact that in 1933 and the years following, Bonhoeffer was the first and almost the only one to face and tackle the Jewish question so centrally and energetically. I have long since regarded it as a fault on my part that I did not make this question a decisive issue, at least publicly in the church conflict (e.g. in the two Barmen Declarations I drafted in 1934) . . . since my interests were elsewhere I did not . . . put up a fight on the matter. Only from your book have I become aware that Bonhoeffer did so from the very first. Perhaps this is why he was not at Barmen nor later at Dahlem.

One action that Bonhoeffer took at this time did bear immediate fruit. He together with Martin Niemoeller on 7 September 1933 issued a brief declaration condemning the Aryan Clause. This led to the founding of the Pastors' Emergency League. The response exceeded all expectations. By the end of the month it had gained the signatures of 2,000 pastors, and by the end of the year 6,000.<sup>39</sup> This was a forerunner to the Confessing Church that came into existence the following year.

### The return to Germany

A month later, in October 1933, Bonhoeffer left Germany to take a German speaking pastorate in England. Since April he had passionately advocated a series of responses to the Aryan Clause all of which had come to nothing.<sup>40</sup> As he wrote in a letter to Barth<sup>41</sup> "I felt that I was incomprehensibly in radical opposition to all my friends, that my views on matters were taking me more and more into isolation, . . ." He remained in England for two years, returning only when called by the Confessing Church to head one of its seminaries.

In 1939 he left Germany again, to avoid being called up for military service for the war he saw coming.<sup>42</sup> Shortly after arriving in New York, however, he abruptly canceled his plans and decided to return to Germany.<sup>43</sup> "I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany," he wrote in his famous letter to Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>44</sup> In his diary he compared himself to a soldier on leave from the front, who must return, lest he abandon his life. "There is nothing pious about it, but something almost vital."<sup>45</sup>

The contrast between these two departures is striking. David Hopper<sup>46</sup> has argued, convincingly in my view, that this decision to return to Germany in 1939 is the crucial turning point

in Bonhoeffer's life. Hopper has drawn a comparison between Bonhoeffer's departure for New York in 1939 and his earlier departure for England in 1933. He discussed both in the context of Bonhoeffer's relationship to Barth.

In 1933 Bonhoeffer received a sharp rebuke from Barth<sup>47</sup> for leaving Germany. He ignored Barth's appeal to return immediately. In 1939, by contrast, he did not consult Barth.<sup>48</sup> This time Bonhoeffer left Germany with the approval of the Confessing Church and the strong encouragement of his American friends. Nobody was telling him to return. The Germany he was leaving in 1939 was far more dangerous than the one he had left in 1933. He had the complete 'freedom' to stay in America. Yet he soon decided to return to Germany and did so, as he would later reaffirm, in complete "freedom."

For Bonhoeffer freedom does not ultimately consist in having choices.<sup>49</sup> Rather, freedom is found in the certainty created by God's call. It was in fact the recognition of God's call that resulted in Bonhoeffer's decision to return to Germany. He stated this in his letter to Niebuhr quoted above. "God's will for me [has been] clarified." In contrast to the slightly moralistic tone of this letter, Bonhoeffer insisted in his diary that his decision was not something "pious" – that is, something done under the compulsion of 'should' or 'ought' – but rather something "vital" – something done in true "freedom," namely the freedom created by God's call. This shows the strong influence of Luther's views of call and freedom on him.

He wrote in his diary at this time<sup>50</sup>

freedom must be won under the compulsion of a necessity. Freedom for the church comes from the necessity of the word of God. Otherwise it becomes arbitrariness . . .

After his return to Germany he wrote<sup>51</sup>

in God's commandment . . . life . . . is given a clear direction, an inner continuity and a firm security. . . . thus it implies freedom from the fear of decision, freedom from the fear to act, it implies certainty, quietude, confidence, balance, and peace.

This decision to return played a central role in Bonhoeffer's search for a concrete ethic. It brought freedom not only for himself but for others as well. One surprised colleague in Germany described the effect of his return.<sup>52</sup>

It is this fact – that he abandoned in all clarity many great possibilities for his own development in the free countries, that he returned to dismal slavery and a dark future, but also to his own reality – which gave to everything he told us a strong and joyful firmness, such as arises out of realized freedom.

A friend from Switzerland recalled meeting Bonhoeffer and his fellow conspirators, mainly family and friends, on a visit in autumn 1942.<sup>53</sup>

They had that calmness and simplicity which at first sight indicates a man who has nothing to fear, either from others or from himself, and whose life runs along smoothly, without remarkable events, in a peaceful country. But this calmness and simplicity created a zone of light and freedom such as I have never experienced before or since.

Writing from prison after his arrest in April 1943 Bonhoeffer twice referred explicitly to his decision to return. In the first of these he wrote<sup>54</sup>

Now I want to assure you that I haven't for a moment regretted coming back in 1939 – nor any of the consequences either. I knew quite well what I was doing, and I acted with a clear conscience. I've no wish to cross out of my life anything that has happened since . . . And I regard my being kept here . . . as being involved in Germany's fate, as I was resolved to

be. I don't look back on the past and accept the present reproachfully, but I don't want the machinations of men to make me waver. All we can do is to live in assurance and faith . . .

He returned to this theme – of the certainty that comes from accepting what is received from God's hands – several times in his prison letters. "I'm firmly convinced – however strange it may seem – that my life has followed a straight and unbroken course."<sup>55</sup> "I'm grateful for the past and present, and content with them."<sup>56</sup> In one of his last letters he wrote "I'm so sure of God's guiding hand that I hope I shall always be kept in that certainty. You must never doubt that I'm travelling with cheerfulness along the road where I'm being led."<sup>57</sup>

### The resistance

Shortly after his return Bonhoeffer began working for the *Abwehr*, military counter intelligence.<sup>58</sup> Under Admiral Wilhelm Canaris it had become a center of resistance in which his family and friends were also involved. The decision to join the resistance followed naturally from the one to return to Germany. It too was taken without any consultation with Barth. When Barth learned about it, he disapproved. This was expressed in a letter<sup>59</sup> to Bonhoeffer from Barth's close assistant in 1942.

there is actually something 'uncanny' for Karl Barth, namely all the attempts to save Germany from the evident misery into which it has now been plunged by still more 'national' undertakings. This includes those that the generals might venture.

Barth could see no essential difference between Nazism and the Prussian military and political traditions of many of the conspirators.<sup>60</sup> Barth repeated the following sentiment several times during the war.<sup>61</sup>

when the war is over . . . it will be imperative to render physically impossible any further developments on the fatal course which leads from Frederick the Great through Bismark to Hitler.

Bonhoeffer completely rejected this view of the development of Nazism,<sup>62</sup> calling it a "grotesque mistake." Much of his activity in the resistance was an attempt to convince the western allies, especially the British, to encourage the German resistance.<sup>63</sup> The resistance made a point of gathering information about Nazi atrocities.<sup>64</sup> They understood far better than the allies the murderous nature of the Nazi regime. They were regarded by the allies, however, as being not essentially different from the Nazis. This inability to distinguish between the resistance and the Nazis is connected to the inability of the West to take seriously the accounts of Nazi atrocities and respond effectively during the war.

In September 1941 Bonhoeffer visited Geneva. With the recent invasion of the Soviet Union he was all the more convinced that the Nazis were doomed. He was anxious to enter into the discussion of peace aims and he set down his thoughts in some notes.<sup>65</sup> Here he discussed the Biblical principles upon which the postwar German state should be based. The ordered society for which he called had been threatened in the past not only by the "all-powerful state" of the Nazis, but also by the "liberal anarchy" of the Weimar Republic. He discussed the question of freedom in very Lutheran terms.

Freedom *from* something experiences its fulfillment only in freedom *for* something. Freedom for freedom's sake, however, leads to anarchy. Biblically, freedom means: freedom for service to God and the neighbor, freedom for obedience to the commands of God. . . . Freedom is not primarily and individual right but a responsibility, freedom is not primarily oriented to the individual but to the neighbor . . .

The most important practical steps for peace that Bonhoeffer wanted from allied leaders were public statements that would encourage the German resistance. He expressed his dismay that these were not being made. It is now known that Churchill was against this and so no such encouragement was forthcoming. This was a great disappointment to the resistance, including Bonhoeffer.

Barth, by contrast, wanted no encouragement given to this ‘national’ resistance. He commended the British government for avoiding any discussion of peace aims and encouraged British Christians to do likewise.<sup>66</sup> In Barth’s discussion of how to bring peace the Germans play a very passive role. There is no place for the German resistance in Barth’s writings.

In his notes Bonhoeffer expressed his concern about the Soviet Union, especially about the extreme nationalism that Stalin had begun to promote. That this could be described as “racist” by a serious Bonhoeffer scholar<sup>67</sup> is indicative of how unacceptable his views are still today. According to this scholar “Bonhoeffer’s thought had fallen back into the conventional disjunction of two-realm thought.”<sup>68</sup>

### Ethics

Indeed Bonhoeffer had returned to Luther’s two kingdoms teaching in his approach to the German resistance, employing it in a most creative way.<sup>69</sup> His description of the resistance is one of the most dramatic features of his *Ethics*, which he was writing while participating in the resistance. Many leaders of the resistance were members of the military or the government whose positions had been usurped by the Nazis. Bonhoeffer strove to enable them to act.<sup>70</sup> They had “divinely ordained authority to exercise worldly dominion by divine right.”<sup>71</sup> He encouraged them to use whatever remained of this God-given authority to oppose the Nazis. In the face of the Nazi revolution the two kingdoms remained strictly separate but in close alliance.<sup>72</sup>

Two things alone have still the power to avert the final plunge into the void. One is the miracle of a new awakening of faith, and the other is that force which the Bible calls the ‘restrainer’ (II Thess. 2:7), that is to say the force of order, equipped with great physical strength, which effectively blocks the way of those who are about to plunge into the abyss. The miracle is the saving act of God, which intervenes from above, from beyond whatever is historically attainable or probable, and creates new life out of the void. It is a raising of the dead. And the ‘restrainer’ is the force which takes effect within history through God’s governance of the world, and which sets due limits to evil. . . . The place where the miracle of God is proclaimed is the Church. The ‘restrainer’ is the power of the state to establish and maintain order. The two are entirely different in nature, yet in the face of imminent chaos they are in close alliance, and are both alike objects of the hatred of the forces of destruction, which see in them their deadliest enemies.

Many members of the resistance, especially in his own family, had not considered themselves to be Christians in any serious way before the Nazis came to power. Rather they considered themselves defenders of traditional liberal values. He described the remarkable developments that brought such people into close proximity to the church.<sup>73</sup>

We begin this section by referring to one of our most astonishing experiences during the period when Christianity was sorely oppressed. The deification of the irrational, of blood and instinct, of the beast of prey in man . . . [had placed in danger the defenders of liberal values]. Reason, culture, humanity, tolerance and self-determination, all these concepts which until very recently had served as battle slogans against the Church, against Christianity, against Jesus Christ Himself, had now suddenly and surprisingly come very near indeed to

the Christian standpoint. . . . it was these concepts that had somehow become homeless and now sought refuge in the Christian sphere, in the shadow of the Christian Church. . . . The children of the Church, who had become independent and gone their own ways, now in the hour of danger returned to their mother. . . . Reason, justice, culture, humanity and all the kindred concepts sought and found a new purpose and a new power in their origin.

This origin is Jesus Christ. . . . There seems to be a general unconscious knowledge, which, in the hour of ultimate peril, leads everything which desires not to fall victim to the Antichrist to take refuge with Christ.

What is it that drew these “children” to their “mother?” How did they “learn to speak the name of Jesus Christ” although “with hesitation and embarrassment” or even “genuine fear?” Bonhoeffer’s explanation echoes Luther’s theology of the cross.<sup>74</sup>

it was the concrete suffering of injustice . . . which impelled the men who held these values dear to seek the protection of Jesus Christ and therefore to become subject to His claim, . . . the crucified Christ has become the refuge and the justification, the protection and the claim for the higher values and their defenders that have fallen victim to suffering. It is with the Christ who is persecuted and who suffers in His Church that justice, truth, humanity and freedom now seek refuge; it is with the Christ who found no shelter in the world, the Christ who was cast out from the world, the Christ of the crib and of the cross, under whose protection they now seek sanctuary, and who thereby for the first time displays the full extent of His power.

He emphasized the importance of a close alliance of the resistance with the church, not only from the side of the resistance but also from the side of the church. To realize this, however, the church must adhere strongly to its task of preaching the gospel.<sup>75</sup>

In devoting herself to her proper task, that is to say to preaching the risen Jesus Christ, the Church strikes a mortal blow at the spirit of destruction. The ‘restrainer’, the force of order, sees in the Church an ally, and, whatever other elements of order may remain, will seek a place at her side. Justice, truth, science, art, culture, humanity, liberty, patriotism, all at last, after long straying from the path, are once more finding their way back to their fountain-head. The more central the message of the Church, the greater now will be her effectiveness. Her suffering presents an infinitely greater danger to the spirit of destruction than does any political power which may still remain. . . . the Church, while still preserving the essential distinction between herself and these forces, . . . unreservedly allies herself with them . . .

Thus “there gathered around her men who came from very far away, and men to whom she could not refuse her fellowship and her protection.”<sup>76</sup> It is here that Bonhoeffer warned the church against “any timid impulse to draw narrow limits.”

This brings us to the question posed at the end of the introduction. Who was using Christianity as a polemical weapon against the secular? To whom does the warning against the “timid impulse to draw narrow limits” apply?<sup>77</sup> Was he referring to the Confessing Church and Karl Barth? Is this related to the questions Bonhoeffer raised in his letters from prison about Barth and the Confessing Church?<sup>78</sup> We have no definitive answer here and simply offer two observations. Bonhoeffer’s comments are certainly based on his experience with the resistance, an experience not shared by Barth nor most of the members of the Confessing Church. Barth in his situation still found it necessary to emphasize the differences between himself and various humanistic expressions of the Christians of England.<sup>79</sup>

Let us end with Bonhoeffer’s final word on his relationship to Luther.<sup>80</sup>

During the last year or so I've come to know and understand more and more the profound this-worldliness of Christianity. The Christian is not a *homo religiosus*, but simply a man, as Jesus was a man – in contrast, shall we say, to John the Baptist. I don't mean the shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable, or the lascivious, but the profound this-worldliness, characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection. I think Luther lived a this-worldly life in this sense.

#### Endnotes

1. Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Harper and Row, 1970) 116.
2. *Ibid.* 48, 56, 143, and 362 for example.
3. *Ibid.* 50-55.
4. Karl Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, ed. J. Fangmeier and H. Stoevesandt (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids MI, 1981) 255.
5. Karl Barth, *A letter to Great Britian from Switzerland* (The Sheldon Press: London, 1941) 36-37.
6. *Letters op. cit.* 250-251.
7. Joseph Robinson, "The Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *VISN*, published by *The National Interfaith Cable Coalition*, New York **6:2** (April-June 1993) 4-5.
8. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer op. cit.* 97-98. See also David H. Hopper, *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer* (Westminster: Philadelphia, 1975) 64. Although disagreeing at some points, I find this one of the most interesting books about Bonhoeffer.
9. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, ed. E. H. Robertson (Fontana: New York, 1970) 109.
10. See for example *No Rusty Swords, ibid.* 85-87. See also his criticism of the Riverside Church in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Way to Freedom*, ed. E. H. Robertson (Fontana: New York, 1972) 230-231. He summarized these views in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (Macmillan: New York, 1965) 355f.
11. *No Rusty Swords op. cit.* 87.
12. See Paul P. Kuenning, "Thomas Muentzer, theologian and rebel with a cause," *The Covenant Quarterly* **44:4** (November 1986) 3-23, and "Luther and Muentzer: Contrasting theologies in regard to secular authority within the context of the German peasant revolt," *Journal of Church and State* **29:1** (Winter 1987) 305-321.
13. See my "Luther, Bonhoeffer and revolution," *Lutheran Forum* **25:4** (Advent 1991) 24-28.
14. Paul P. Kuenning, "The case for a worldly Christianity," *Currents in Theology and Mission* **19:1** (February 1992) 44.
15. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Macmillan: New York, 1972) 369.
16. Referring to Bonhoeffer's letter in *No Rusty Swords op. cit.* 115-117.
17. E. H. Robertson, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (John Knox: Richmond VA, 1966) 37.
18. *Ibid.* 47.
19. *Ethics op. cit.* 199.
20. *No Rusty Swords op. cit.* 217-225.

21. *Ibid.* 39.
22. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer op. cit.* 209.
23. *Ibid.* 232.
24. Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich I* (Fortress: Philadelphia, 1988) 456.
25. *No Rusty Swords op. cit.* 238.
26. *The Churches and the Third Reich I op. cit.* 458.
27. See the excellent analysis of the Bethel confession by Guy Carter, “Confession at Bethel, August 1933 – enduring witness: The formation, revision and significance of the first full theological confession of the Evangelical Church struggle in Nazi Germany” Dissertation, Marquette University, April 1987 (University Microfilms International: Ann Arbor MI) 228f for example.
28. *Ibid.* 77-78.
29. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer op. cit.* 238.
30. *Ibid.* 233.
31. *Ibid.* 239.
32. *No Rusty Swords op. cit.* 226.
33. *Ibid.* 228.
34. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer op. cit.* 239.
35. *The Churches and the Third Reich I op. cit.* 458
36. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer op. cit.* 297.
37. *The Churches and the Third Reich I op. cit.* 439.
38. *Letters op. cit.* 250.
39. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer op. cit.* 240-241.
40. *Ibid.* 254-255.
41. *No Rusty Swords op. cit.* 231.
42. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer op. cit.* 538-542.
43. *Ibid.* 557.
44. *The Way to Freedom op. cit.* 246.
45. *Ibid.* 238.
46. *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer op. cit.* 117f. This discussion has been important in shaping my understanding of Bonhoeffer.
47. *No Rusty Swords op. cit.* 233-36
48. Barth apparently assumed that Bonhoeffer’s return to Germany in 1939 was a result of his admonition to return in 1933. See *Letters* 316. In this Barth assumed too much about his influence on Bonhoeffer. It indicates that he misunderstood the fundamental nature of Bonhoeffer’s return in 1939.
49. *No Rusty Swords op. cit.* 100.
50. *The Way to Freedom op. cit.* 240.
51. *Ethics op. cit.* 280-281.
52. Helmut Traub, “Two recollections,” in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wolf-Dieter

Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith (Fontana: New York, 1973) 159-160.

53. Jacques Courvoisier, "Theological Existence," in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer* *ibid.* 175.

54. *Letters and Papers from Prison* *op. cit.* 174.

55. *Ibid.* 272.

56. *Ibid.* 370.

57. *Ibid.* 393.

58. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* *op. cit.* 603.

59. Letter from Lollo von Kirschbaum of 17 May 1942 in *Newsletter: International Bonhoeffer Society* **22** (June 1982) 8.

60. For a good portrait of the resistance community see Jane Pesja, *Matriarch of Conspiracy* (Kenwood: Minneapolis, 1991).

61. *A Letter to Great Britain from Switzerland* *op. cit.* 37.

62. *Ethics* *op. cit.* 101-102

63. See *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* *op. cit.* 638f. See also W. A. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (Westminster: Philadelphia, 1973) 150f.

64. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* *op. cit.* 576 and 649 for example.

65. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Gedanken" in *Gesammelte Schriften I* (Kaiser Verlag: Munich 1965) 356-360.

66. *A Letter to Great Britain from Switzerland* *op. cit.* 22-23.

67. Thomas I. Day, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Christian Community and Common Sense* (Edwin Mellen: Toronto, 1982) 172.

68. *Ibid.* 176.

69. The material in this section is also discussed in pages 26-32 of Robert W. Bertram, "Barmen and Bonhoeffer: An American perspective," a paper presented at the *Sixth International Bonhoeffer Society Conference*, Union Theological Seminary, New York NY, August 1992. There are several points of overlap in our two papers. I am indebted to Bertram for many discussions over a period of years on the issues treated in this paper.

70. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* *op. cit.* 530 for example.

71. *Ethics* *op. cit.* 332.

72. *Ibid.* 108.

73. *Ibid.* 55-56.

74. *Ibid.* 57-59.

75. *Ibid.* 109.

76. *Ibid.* 58.

77. These questions and the tentative answers put forward here were first suggested to me by Robert Bertram and are discussed in his paper referenced above.

78. *Letters and Papers from Prison* *op. cit.* 317, 328-329, 381-383.

79. *A Letter to Great Britian from Switzerland* *op. cit.* 16.

80. *Letters and Papers from Prison* *op. cit.* 369.