

**The ‘two natures’ of Christ: A Critical Analysis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s
Christology**

By

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Stellvertretung

Theotokos

Two Natures



ABSTRACT

This study will contribute to the substantial corpus of secondary scholarship on the life, ministry, and theology of the German theologian, church leader, and modern-day martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). Bonhoeffer's legacy has also elicited considerable interest in the South African context, concerning a wide variety of themes such as the Confessing Church movement, secularisation, discipleship, confessing guilt, spirituality, and ethics. The critical question articulated by Bonhoeffer predominantly in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, namely 'Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?' has been raised by different generations of South African theologians in rapidly changing contexts. This study will concentrate on Bonhoeffer's own Christology. The focus will be not so much on the significance of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ within a particular social context, but on how Bonhoeffer understands the person of Christ. More specifically, the problem investigated in this study is how Dietrich Bonhoeffer's evolving views on the so-called 'two natures' of Christ should be understood. The Nicene confession, 'that Jesus Christ is Lord, that he is 'truly God' and 'of one being with the Father, ' prompted considerable reflection in Patristic Christianity. One crucial question was how the confession of the divinity of Christ reconciles with the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth portrayed so vividly in the canonical gospels. The formulation of the Council of Chalcedon, namely that one may speak of 'two natures' and 'one person,' has never been satisfactory and prompted further controversy but remains a point of reference in ongoing Christological debates to this day. The question, therefore, raised: How does Bonhoeffer understand the relationship between the 'divine' and the 'human' nature of Jesus Christ? This question is pertinent given the consistent Christological concentration in Bonhoeffer's theology (even to the point of a Trinitarian reductionism), his increasing emphasis on a 'this-worldly' understanding of God's transcendence and his consistent Lutheran intuition that the finite can indeed contain the infinite.

Bonhoeffer's Christology has been the subject of much scholarly interest. There is consensus that his Christology remains not only incomplete but also unresolved. A core problem in this regard is his understanding of the divine nature of Christ – which he assumes but of which he

does not offer any full account. This study will contribute to the available literature by exploring Bonhoeffer's understanding of the 'two natures' of Christ based on the primary and secondary research with specific reference to *Sanctorum Communio* (1927/1963), *Act and Being* (1930/1996), *Christology, Discipleship* (1937/1959), *Ethics* (1955, 6th edition and 2005, new critical edition) and *Letters and Papers from Prison* (2010).

There has been considerable controversy in Bonhoeffer scholarship regarding the continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theological thinking from his student years to his death in 1945. It would, therefore, be wise to allow for Bonhoeffer's 'evolving' views on the 'two natures' of Jesus Christ to speak for itself. This study will seek to describe and assess (in terms of Bonhoeffer's sources and secondary scholarship) Bonhoeffer's views in each of his main works to trace the developments in his thinking.



DECLARATION

I declare that *The 'two natures' of Christ: A Critical Analysis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christology* is my work, that it has not been for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Full Name: Paul Dankers

Date: 14 November 2019

Signed:



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Hitherto I have come; therefore, I would like to thank the Almighty for giving me the grace and endurance to go thus far in my academic journey.

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“Hitherto you have brought me.”

עדכהשהבאתלי

DEDICATION

To my father, Leonard John Dankers (4 February 1943 – 18 November 1998), to whose memory I dedicate this thesis.

I thank him for nurturing me from the age of 8 always to follow in the footsteps of Christ and planting the love of studying God's word within me.

You taught me to know what Jesus Christ himself wants of me and how I should heed to the simple call of obedience in discipleship to Christ.

I pray that your memory will live on in my life and my future academic work.

Love you dad.



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DBWE	Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, <i>English Edition</i>
DBWE 1	Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, <i>English Edition</i> , Volume 1, <i>Sanctorum Communio</i>
DBWE 2	Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, <i>English Edition</i> , Volume 2, <i>Act and Being</i>
DBWE 4	Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, <i>English Edition</i> , Volume 4, <i>Discipleship</i>
DBWE 6	Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, <i>English Edition</i> , Volume 6, <i>Ethics</i>
DBWE 8	Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, <i>English Edition</i> , Volume 8, <i>Letters and Papers from Prison</i>
DBWE 12	Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, <i>English Edition</i> , Volume 12, <i>Berlin 1932- 1933, Christology (299-360)</i>
IBS	International Bonhoeffer Society
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
PCSA	Presbyterian Church of South Africa

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Chapter 1 The Relevance of Bonhoeffer's Christology

1.1 Introduction

There has been considerable controversy in Bonhoeffer scholarship regarding the continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theological thinking from his student years to his death in 1945. It would, therefore, be wise to allow for Bonhoeffer's 'evolving' views on the 'two natures' of Jesus Christ to speak for itself. This study will seek to describe and assess (in terms of his sources and secondary scholarship) Bonhoeffer's views in each of his main works to trace the developments in his thinking. Bonhoeffer's renderings of his Christology – precisely the nature and work of Christ – has come under considerable scrutiny. His famous *Letters and Papers from Prison* have prompted such investigation, especially amongst evangelicals. It is not surprising that Bonhoeffer would come under so much scrutiny because of his provocative view expressed in phrases such as 'human-God,' 'transcendence,' 'negative Christology,' 'come of age,' and 'religionless Christianity.' Therefore, I believe Bonhoeffer deserves further investigation not to exonerate his rendering of Christ but, on the contrary, to examine his theological development. Eberhard Bethge aptly explains Bonhoeffer's theological development in his definitive biography *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision, Man of Courage* first published in 1970.

1.2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Legacy: The Relevance of studying Dietrich Bonhoeffer

When Dietrich Bonhoeffer died in 1945, he was relatively unknown in Germany and the English-speaking world except for his family, friends like Bethge and some ecumenical contacts in England, Switzerland, and Sweden – the likes of Bishop Bell, Visser 't Hooft and Jean Lasserre. Subsequently, after the translations of Bonhoeffer's works, mostly posthumously, and Bethge's publication of these works, Bonhoeffer's fame increased. It was not only the English translations of Bonhoeffer's works that first attracted post-war attention, but the German texts attracted attention too. It mainly was the posthumous translations, that attracted attention, viz., the publication of *Letters and Papers from Prison*, *Ethics*, and *Christology*. The first publication that attracted the most attention was Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* – first published in German (1949), and the first English edition

published in 1953. Eberhard Bethge edited the first German edition to whom Bonhoeffer addressed most of the letters. The theological reflections in these letters by someone who struggled explicitly with the idea of faith in a secular age incited much discussion and controversy in English-speaking contexts. In contrast, the posthumous publication of *Christology*, although its theology can be traced in Bonhoeffer's later writings, leads one to conclude that it attracted less attention than the posthumous works *Letters and Papers from Prison* and *Ethics*. The *Christology* lectures were less controversial and can be recognised as a validation of thoughts and statements Bonhoeffer expressed in his earlier writings. Besides, one can presume that during this period of writing – from the penning of *Christology*, *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*, written in the thick of Germany's political turmoil. In the *Editors introduction to the English edition* of volume 12 the editor notes:

Not all of Bonhoeffer's work in 1932-33 was so directly tied to political and ecclesiastical turmoil. Nor was it so hurried and immediate, an urgent reply to a critical event (DBWE 12:37).¹

Distinctly the interest in certain of his posthumous works stimulated further interest, in various waves and different themes, from here on into the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Although Bonhoeffer wrote well, his writings individually could not explain the extent of his written legacy. John de Gruchy points out that Bonhoeffer studies have gone through three distinctive profiles. During the 1950s, the focus was on biographical studies; during the 1960s on the question of secularisation; and during the 1970s, attention shifted to Bonhoeffer's philosophical roots (see John de Gruchy 1999:99).

The first of Bonhoeffer's works translated into English was *The Cost of Discipleship* published in 1949. Then in 1953, the first English edition of Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* was translated by Reginald Fuller and published. Similarly, the start of the earliest collections of Bonhoeffer studies was published in *Die Mündige Welt*, Volumes I-V, from 1956 to 1963 in German edited by Eberhard Bethge. These collections of Bonhoeffer studies set the stage for the beginning of the earliest views on interpreting Bonhoeffer's theology. In the 1960s, Bonhoeffer was labeled the radical theologian of secular Christianity and was held responsible

¹ For further discussion, see Editors Introduction in DBWE 12:37-44, 2009.

for the “theology of the death of God.” Bishop John Robinson popularised this label in his publication of *Honest to God* (1963). Robinson was widely read and left a tremendous theological impression on Christianity by employing Bonhoeffer’s concept of ‘religionless Christianity,’ using it to translate Christianity into the secular. Also, the American theologian Harvey Cox published *The Secular City* (1965) in which he asserted that the “rise of urban civilisation and the collapse of traditional religion are the two main hallmarks of our era,” thus also positing secularism (see Cox 1965:1). In addition to his renowned *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Bonhoeffer’s *Cost of Discipleship* (1937), as well as *Life Together*, remained devotional classics, widely read in the 1960s particularly amongst evangelicals. During the 1960s his *Ethics* (published in German in 1949, critical edition 1974) received relatively little attention compared to the *Letters and Papers from Prison* correspondence, the *Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*. This considerable interest in Bonhoeffer’s written legacy decades after his death was taken further in many different ways, one of which was to concentrate on his biography.

Eberhard Bethge – a good friend and a relative – painstakingly preserved Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s legacy. He edited Bonhoeffer’s scholarly and more famous works. This effort contributed much to the preservation and publication of Bonhoeffer’s legacy, specifically Bethge’s definitive biography *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Eine Biographie*, published in 1967. The first English edition *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* was published in 1970. A new version was edited by Victoria J. Barnett, who corrected some translation errors and added material from the German edition, notably on Bonhoeffer’s childhood that had never appeared in English, and published it in 2000. Besides, Eberhard Bethge also edited *Friendship and Resistance: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (1995). We have to deduce then that most of Bonhoeffer’s posthumous fame is attributable to Eberhard Bethge, who made Bonhoeffer an icon. As scholarly interest heightened, more and more documents and letters emerged so that a new comprehensive publication project was launched in the 1980s, which led to the publication of a series of 17 volumes of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer works in German, subsequently also translated into English.

Perhaps nothing better illustrates the interest in Bonhoeffer's legacy than the International Bonhoeffer Congresses, held every four years since the launching of the International Bonhoeffer Society in 1972 in Kaiserswerth, Germany. Subsequent congresses have been held in Geneva, Oxford, East Berlin, Amsterdam, New York, Cape Town, Berlin, Rome, Prague, Sigtuna, and Basel (see De Gruchy 1997:344). There is currently a healthy ongoing debate on Bonhoeffer's legacy through the International Bonhoeffer Society (IBS), besides a further influx of diverse Bonhoeffer topics by different scholars. Continual IBS conferences are held (every fourth year) to explore relevant issues within a specific context of Bonhoeffer's theology and in tandem with its relevance for the church today. Sequentially, the first IBS conference was held in Düsseldorf-Kaiserswerth in 1971 with the theme: *'Praxis und Theorie des politischen Engagements der Kirche'* that was aimed expressly at addressing Bonhoeffer's contributions to the church's political engagement. The 1976 conference *'The Work and Influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer'* examined Bonhoeffer's legacy for contemporary ethical and theological issues. The 1980 conference *'Bonhoeffer and the Church in the Modern World'* addressed all the relevant issues regarding the church's witness in a 'modern world.' The 1984 conference concerned *'Bonhoeffer, Barmen and the Confession of Christ today'* and the 1988 conference *'Bonhoeffer's Ethical Legacy.'*

The following 1992 conference *'Bonhoeffer's Legacy for the Future: Responsibility in a New World'* reflected on the future of theology and the life of the church in place of being able to place Bonhoeffer's writings contextually within the narrative of our responsibility in this new world. After that, the 1996 conference was hosted in Cape Town, posing the question *'Are we still of any use? Bonhoeffer for a New Day'*. This conference specifically addressed the relevance of Bonhoeffer's prison theology for a South African context posing the question: *'Are we in South Africa still of any use in 1996 just after the dawn of democracy in 1994?'* A momentous occasion for South African theologians was the hosting of the 7th International Bonhoeffer Congress in Cape Town. At the outset of the congress leaders who were involved in the struggle against apartheid concerned themselves with the question of the extent to which Bonhoeffer was still relevant for South Africa. They asked: "Are we of any use?" and "Who is

Jesus Christ for us today?”

The conference in 2000 ‘*Religion and the Shape of Christianity in the 21st Century*’ focused on issues of modernity, pluralism, ecumenism, and Christian freedom concerning the challenges of the 21st century. The 2004 conference ‘*Bonhoeffer and Christian Humanism*’ explored the healthy elements in Bonhoeffer's legacy that suggested opposite ways to tradition. Topics explored aspects of humanism, secularity, and fundamentalism found in contemporary society. These aspects were all explored in the context of Bonhoeffer's legacy. The 2008 conference ‘*Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology in Today's World: A Way between Fundamentalism and Secularism?*’ focused on Bonhoeffer's theological reflections in the *Letters and Papers from Prison* and how his theology in prison can guide the church in avoiding fundamentalism and secularism. The 2012 conference ‘*A Spoke in the Wheel: Reconsidering the Political in Bonhoeffer's Theology*’ pursued the relevance of Bonhoeffer's political theology and ethics for the Christian church in a world characterised by an escalating gap between the rich and the poor. It addressed the pertinent question: What is the role of the church in all of this? Lastly, the 2016 conference ‘*Engaging Bonhoeffer in a Global Era: Christian Belief, Witness, Service*’ explored how international experiences and ecumenical contacts fashioned Bonhoeffer's theology. Is Bonhoeffer's theology still helpful in our developing global world of electronics and its interconnectedness through media?

At present, the interest in Bonhoeffer continues, and the avid Bonhoeffer scholar can explore different avenues to gain access to Bonhoeffer's theological and written legacy. An updated commended new series of the German editions of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* has been translated into the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* and is completed and available. The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Project brought the critical edition (17 volumes), especially into an English scholarly version. The English edition (DBWE) presents a fresh, critical translation of Bonhoeffer's writings with ample study tools, an introduction, annotations, preface, epilogue, and interpretations of Bonhoeffer's texts in the broader frame of twentieth-century thought and history. A bibliography of primary and secondary sources is also provided online for a continued updated index of items held by the Burke Library Archives at Union Theological

Seminary in the City of New York, USA.

The interest in Bonhoeffer also attracted prolific South African attention and reception by South African scholars. The influx of literature gradually made the church and the world aware of Bonhoeffer's rich theological legacy. To undergird an understanding of Bonhoeffer's written heritage, John W. De Gruchy suggests that three related themes proposed by Eberhard Bethge continue to attract attention. In essence, the first theme is discipleship in the community, as reflected in his writings *Discipleship* and *Life Together*. Secondly, there is the theme of Bonhoeffer's involvement in the struggle for justice and peace, which relates to 'political participation in the conspiracy.' The second theme Bonhoeffer expresses in his lectures, notably on the 'Jewish question' in *Ethics*. The third theme is the continual struggle with faith in a secular age, which Bonhoeffer reflected upon theologically in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* (see De Gruchy 1999:103). The particular theme of Bonhoeffer's involvement in the struggle for justice and peace, specifically with regards to resistance against an oppressive regime, elicited interest, especially within the South African and North American contexts. This theme was explored further in the fields of liberation theology, black theology, the Confessing Church movement, secularisation, discipleship, spirituality, and ethics. The critical question articulated by Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, namely 'Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?' has been raised by different generations of South African theologians in rapidly changing contexts.

Prominent South African theologians such as Beyers Naudé, John de Gruchy, Douglas Bax, Dirkie Smit, Russel Botman, Carel Anthonissen, Nico Koopman and Robert Vosloo all explored Bonhoeffer's theology. They explored the significance of a confessing church and the relevance of Bonhoeffer's theology in the South African context – thereby initiating an impetus for the conception of a confessing church in South Africa.

For Beyers Naudé, founder of the Christian Institute, the task of nation-building was important. That meant that confessing Christ implied rejecting the cultured Christianity of those who supported apartheid. He attempted to create a 'confessing movement,' something akin to the Confessing Church that arose in Germany during the Nazi regime but more adapted to the

situation in South Africa. The First International Bonhoeffer Congress in Kaiserswerth (1971) inspired Beyers Naudé, particularly by the similarity between Bonhoeffer's legacy and the struggle against Apartheid. In 1996 Beyers Naudé presented the opening address at the International Bonhoeffer Congress in Cape Town. Here he leveled Bonhoeffer's question toward South Africans: 'Who is Christ, for us, today?' These experiences at the conferences and dialogue with renown Bonhoeffer scholars at the meeting would later inspire Naudé to present papers on issues such as 'The Need for Political Reform' (2005); and also to raise an appeal to be cognisant of the injustices found in South Africa, in his address on the 'Christian Involvement in the Struggle for Human Rights and Justice' (2005). Robert Vosloo writes about Naudé:

Naudé, who by his own admission found inspiration from Bonhoeffer, indeed played an important role in stimulating the discussion on possible parallels between the situation in Nazi Germany and the challenges facing apartheid South Africa and in the 1960s and later. One should certainly acknowledge Naudé's Bonhoeffer-like role in the church struggle against apartheid and his influence in calling attention to the need for a confessing church in South Africa (Vosloo 2013:124).

John de Gruchy, a well-known South African activist against apartheid, theologian, scholar, and ambassador for South Africa, developed a keen interest in the life and theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the 1970s. In 1972 he completed his PhD at UNISA *The Dynamic Structure of the Church: A Comparative Study of the Ecclesiologies of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. De Gruchy built his understanding around both a study and exposition of the fundamental principles which determined the structure of the church in our South African situation. Following his interest in Bonhoeffer, De Gruchy pioneered many campaigns locally and abroad, urging the church (DRC) in South Africa to confess its guilt regarding racism, apartheid, and oppression. In 1973 De Gruchy played a pivotal role in inviting Eberhard Bethge – Bonhoeffer's long-time friend and scribe – to South Africa to showcase the relevance of Bonhoeffer's theology for a South African context. In 1975 he edited a collection of Bethge's essays, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr*. De Gruchy was involved in the IBS conferences, especially as a representative of the South African context and in bringing the International Bonhoeffer Congress to South Africa in 1996, where he presented a paper: 'Are We Still of Any Use?' In the article 'Confessing Guilt in South Africa Today in Dialogue with Dietrich

Bonhoeffer' (1989), De Gruchy compared the narrative of confessing guilt by the Confessing Church in Germany that then too became relevant for our then-current situation in South Africa. For De Gruchy, admitting guilt ultimately meant that there needed to be a willingness to put right (on the churches part) what is wrong with a total commitment toward reparation together with a commitment to change. In 1992, De Gruchy presented a paper at the Sixth International Bonhoeffer Congress '*Bonhoeffer and Christian Witness in South Africa in a Time of Transition*'. In 1997 De Gruchy edited *Creation and Fall* – the critical translation of a Bonhoeffer work into the DBWE series translation. More importantly for De Gruchy was Bonhoeffer's insistence on "confessing Christ concretely here and now" that, for the most part, becomes helpful "in the church struggle against apartheid as a false gospel and heresy" (see De Gruchy 1997:344). Wolfgang Huber avows that,

It was De Gruchy who interpreted Bonhoeffer's theology in a way that made his relevance for the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa evident. The witness of Beyers Naudé, the contribution of Eberhard Bethge, but even more the contributions of John de Gruchy brought Bonhoeffer's theology so close to the South African context that some people even asked: When did Bonhoeffer visit South Africa? (Huber 2014:974).

Douglas Bax, a prominent activist of the Rondebosch United Church in Cape Town, piloted, through the General Assembly, an important decision to embrace civil disobedience against the political policy of apartheid. By this decision, the Assembly resolved to disregard the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act; to refuse to apply for permits for multiracial church meetings and flout the censorship law in quoting banned people like Dr C.F. Beyers Naudé. De Gruchy acknowledges that,

Increasingly, during the 1970s and 1980s, under the leadership of Douglas Bax, who was a pastor of considerable courage and theological acumen, the Rondebosch United Church began to identify more directly with the struggle against apartheid (De Gruchy 2007:32).

Bax also became an outspoken opponent against apartheid in a booklet published by the Presbyterian Church of South Africa (PCSA) in 1979 and wrote an article. '*A Different Gospel: A Critique of the Theology behind Apartheid*' (1979), making a biblical case against apartheid. In 1997 Bax played an integral part in the translation of the DBWE Vol. 3. *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* into English.

Dirkie Smit, a professor of Systematic Theology, also theorised that the struggle against

apartheid would not have developed the way it had without continued conversations with the Barmen declaration, Bonhoeffer, the German Confessing Church, and the history of its reception and interpretation. In his article '*Dietrich Bonhoeffer and 'The Other': 'Accept One Another, Therefore ...'* (Rom.15:7)' (1995) Smit discusses the overarching themes in the oeuvres of Bonhoeffer's concept of Christ as the 'man for others,' which becomes relevant to churches to be a 'church for others', thereby breaking down all barriers with an influence that should be wide-ranging.

Russel Botman, former Vice-Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, in his doctoral thesis on Bonhoeffer in 1994 '*Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation: A critical study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology*' (unpublished doctoral thesis) formulated a fundamental analysis of the Dutch Reformed Church's theology by comparing Bonhoeffer's ethical understanding of discipleship with the South African oppressive system. He concluded that a theology of (social and religious) transformation in South Africa could only occur as a result of a proper ethical understanding of discipleship. Botman also presented a paper entitled '*Who is Jesus Christ as community for us today?*' (1976) at the 7th International Bonhoeffer Congress, appearing later as '*Who is 'Jesus Christ as community' for us today? The quest for community: A challenge to theology in SA*' in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. Botman often used thoughts from Bonhoeffer's theology in his theological assumptions – which he believed could assist in building community in the churches after apartheid.

Carel Anthonissen, while studying in Heidelberg Germany, graduated in Dogmatics on the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Anthonissen also became involved in the social and political problems of South Africa, especially after he became friends with Beyers Naudé. His doctoral thesis (1993) '*Die geloofwaardigheid van die kerk in die teologie van Dietrich Bonhoeffer*' (unpublished dissertation) suggested that Bonhoeffer's theology was relevant and worth exploring for the faith worth of the church in South Africa. Anthonissen often looked for expressions in Bonhoeffer's theology – as to what a credible church meant for Bonhoeffer – to apply it to our South African context. These ideas he aptly highlights in an article '*Living*

through the fire: Bonhoeffer's thoughts on a credible church for today' (2016), arguing that throughout Bonhoeffer's life he wanted to "render the church more credible and authentic" and this became the "heart of Bonhoeffer's theology" (see Anthonissen 2016:33).

Nico Koopman, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch, also writes prolifically on the theology and legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and its relevance for South Africa. In 2004 he presented a paper at the Ninth International Bonhoeffer Congress in Rome, Italy, on Bonhoeffer's *Anthropology and the African Anthropology of ubuntu* – a person exists through other persons. Koopman showed a keen interest in evoking memories of the past, primarily about the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. In 2013 he penned *How Do We Live Responsibly? Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Fulfilment of Dignity in democratic South Africa* (2013). This article serves as a reminder of human dignity and rights. It aptly sums up all that Bonhoeffer's legacy presents us in both encouragement and direction for living responsibly in our South African society. Koopman, for the most part, showed a keen interest in Public Theology. His article *Bonhoeffer and the future of Public Theology in South Africa: The ongoing quest for life together* (2014) presents us with the meaning of Bonhoeffer's theology for Public Theology in South Africa.

Robert Vosloo, a professor of Systematic Theology in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University, often explores the relevance of interpreting Bonhoeffer within a South African context. This theme prevails in his article, *'Time Out of Joint and Future-Oriented Memory: Engaging Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the Search for a Way to Deal Responsibly with the Ghost of the Past'* (2017). Vosloo's further explored the theology of Bonhoeffer in chapters of the following books: *'Interpreting Bonhoeffer in South Africa? The Search for a Responsible Historical and Methodological Responsible Hermeneutic'* (2013); and *'Bonhoeffer, Leadership and a Call to New Authority: A South African Theological Perspective'* (2009). Vosloo often emphasises that Bonhoeffer's life, together with concerning life together as a Trinitarian gift, can also be understood as Bonhoeffer's Christological and ecclesiological understanding of human beings and life together. Vosloo also believes that Bonhoeffer had an intense quest for living together in the church and society. That along the church and

community can have a life of dignity, justice, and freedom for all.

At length, it becomes clear that the significant interest² in Bonhoeffer's legacy ranged far and wide and found in different contexts. *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (ed. John W. de Gruchy, Cambridge University Press, 1999) further illustrates the interest by scholars, written from different social contexts, to explore the significance, thought and legacy of Bonhoeffer. These scholars furnish the reader with an introduction to and commentary on Bonhoeffer's life and work. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and written legacy exerted great interest and influence amongst diverse scholars. Already his inspiration has spanned across a broad spectrum of the Christian world. Remarkably, these interests were subsequently embraced by many different groups, which included the following: the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa; the anti-communist democratic movement in Eastern Europe; the Civil Rights Movement in the United States led by Martin Luther King, Jr.; and many more.

1.3 Statement of Research Problem

This study will contribute to the substantial corpus of secondary scholarship on the life, ministry, and theology of the German theologian, church leader, and modern-day martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). It will concentrate on Bonhoeffer's Christology. The focus will be not so much on the significance of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ within a

² Such a wealth of secondary literature is available on Bonhoeffer's legacy that it may be helpful to identify some of the most significant Bonhoeffer scholars. These include Keith Clements, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (Geneva) (his works on Bonhoeffer include editing Volume 13, London 1933-35 in the English Translation Series of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (2006), the SPCK *Introduction to Bonhoeffer* (2010), *What Freedom? The Persistent Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (2011) and *A Patriotism for Today: Love of Country in Dialogue with the Witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (2011); Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr, Director of the Bonhoeffer Center, and General Editor of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (DBW) English Edition (see *The Wisdom and Witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 2000); Clifford Green, Professor of Theology, and Executive Director of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works translation project (see also *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality* (1999), *The Bonhoeffer Reader* (2013), and *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*, 2013); Geoffrey B. Kelly, author of numerous articles and books on Bonhoeffer's theology (see *A Testament of Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, (ed. 1995) and *The Cost of Moral Leadership: The Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (2012); John Moses, Anglican priest (see also *The Reluctant Revolutionary: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Collision with Prussia-German History* (2009); F. Burton Nelson, Research Professor of Christian Ethics (see *A Testament of Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. (1995); Andreas Pangritz, lecturer in Systematic Theology and author of a number of books on Bonhoeffer's theology (see *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (2000); Larry Rasmussen, the Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics (see *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality Resistance* (1972); Martin Rumscheidt, Professor of Historical and Doctrinal Studies; Peter Selby, a serving Bishop in the Anglican parish; Haddon Willmer, retired professor; Ruth Zerner, Associate Professor of History, and the author of the *Commentary on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Fiction from Prison: Gathering up the Past* (1981).

particular social context, but on how Bonhoeffer understands the person of Christ. More specifically, the problem investigated in this study is how Bonhoeffer's evolving views on the so-called 'two natures' of Christ should be understood. There has been considerable controversy in Bonhoeffer scholarship regarding the continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theological thinking from his student years to his death in 1945. It would, therefore, be wise to allow for Bonhoeffer's 'evolving' views on the 'two natures' of Jesus Christ to unfold as presented in the six main works examined in this study. This study seeks to describe and assess (in terms of the sources that he draws on and regarding secondary scholarship) Bonhoeffer's views in this regard in each of his main works. On this basis, the core task of this study, namely to trace the developments in his thinking on the 'two natures' of Christ, can be approached.

1.4 Research Procedure

This study entails an investigation of primary and secondary literature. The following steps were followed in this regard:

Chapter Two will present an overview of the development of Bonhoeffer's theology, also focusing on secondary Bonhoeffer scholarship, which discusses the continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology in general. The views of prominent Bonhoeffer scholars will be explored to determine the nature and scope of such continuity and discontinuity. Where such discussions touch on his Christology, this will be highlighted specifically.

Chapter Three will offer a brief overview of historical developments on the 'two natures' of Christ. The significance of this study on Bonhoeffer's Christology needs to be understood against the background of the history of Christological debates. Such debates formed the context for Bonhoeffer's Christological reflections. Given the focus of this study on the relationship between the 'two natures' of Christ, a very brief historical survey of developments in the history of Western Christology will be required, with specific reference to tensions that characterised Western Christologies in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This survey will be done based on standard overviews on the history of Christology, including those of Martin

Kähler's and Albert Schweitzer.

Chapters Four through Nine will explore Bonhoeffer's evolving views on the 'two natures' of Christ. The most important part of this study entails a close reading, thick description, and critical analysis of Bonhoeffer's views on the 'two natures' of Christ, as expressed in six of his primary texts. The texts chosen are *Sanctorum Communio* (DBWE 2009); *Act and Being* (DBWE 1996); *Christology* (2009:299-360); *Discipleship* (DBWE 2003); *Ethics* (DBWE 2009); and *Letters and Papers from Prison* (DBWE 2010). I will pay close attention to the related sources which Bonhoeffer draws upon with regards to the 'two natures' of Christ and will engage with secondary scholarship in this regard.

In Chapter Ten, I will examine the developments in Bonhoeffer's Christology. Based on the steps mentioned above, the core task of this study can be addressed, namely, to trace the events in Bonhoeffer's views on the 'two natures' of Christ, as expressed in his earlier and later writings. The study will need to determine whether there is a shift from his previous books primarily on the theology of Christ (the God-human) and whether further development of the traditional Lutheran understanding of the person of Christ (incarnation) can be found in his later writings. If continuity or discontinuity is found, then the problem that will be investigated is how Dietrich Bonhoeffer's evolving views on the so-called 'two natures' of Christ should be understood. This chapter will require no additional sources but will need to correlate debates on the continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology regarding the 'two natures' of Christ, as expressed in the texts selected for this study.

In a final postscript, I will comment on the significance of this study in widening concentric circles. Firstly, I will comment on the relevance of this study for scholarly debates on the continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology in general. Secondly, I will consider whether this study can offer any insights into contemporary discussions on Christology. Thirdly, I will discuss the significance of this study for contemporary Christology, for example, in the South African and broader African contexts. The discussion, as mentioned earlier, will be done in terms of Bonhoeffer's ever-daunting Christological question 'Who is Jesus Christ for us today?' Alternatively, 'what shape does Christ take in our South African context?' One

may also wonder, ‘what is the significance of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for South Africa, today?’



Chapter 2 Continuity and Discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's Theology

2.1 Introduction

The continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theological development must be seen against the background of his theology in general. The focus of this chapter is not so much on Christology as on Bonhoeffer's theology in general.

While Bonhoeffer's Christology will be considered in subsequent chapters, Chapter Two will only focus on the literature on the particular problem of continuity and discontinuity, and how that should be understood. The following Chapter Three will offer a more specific background on the debates of the 'two natures,' and four through nine will investigate Bonhoeffer's views on the 'two natures' of Christ.

Already in the 1930s, Bonhoeffer was known for his ecumenical work and speeches and conferences; but these elicited no real academic responses as yet. In the late 1930s, Bonhoeffer became known because of his more spiritual publications, but the war and his position still precluded investigation of his views. Although Bonhoeffer was already well known in some circles, but not for his academic dissertations, he remained unknown except within his own family. The earliest discussion on the question of continuity or discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's thinking that can be traced – is about God in a secular society.

2.2 Secondary scholarship³ on God in a Secular Society

The publication of *Letters and Papers from Prison* (1949) stimulated an almost immediate interest in Bonhoeffer that instantaneously raised the question of discontinuity. This interest was not so much in Bonhoeffer's theology in general but more a response to the theological positions that he had developed while in prison.

After living in Berlin for a year, Harvey Cox wrote the book *The Secular City* (circa 1965) in response to Bonhoeffer's provocative phrases found in the *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

³ One of the first scholars to give a detailed interpretation on Bonhoeffer's theology and the reaction to it is John A. Phillips (1967). During this time in trying to organise Bonhoeffer's theology he acknowledges that research was still handicapped because of a lack of a detailed biography. Bethge's biography had not yet appeared at this stage.

Cox found discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology by suggesting that Bonhoeffer's phrase 'religionless Christianity' was leaning toward secularism. From the onset of his book, Cox asserts that the "rise of urban civilisation and the collapse of traditional religion are the two main hallmarks of our era," – thereby suggesting that Bonhoeffer was thoroughly secular in his theology (see Cox 1965:1). Although Cox suggests that to some, Bonhoeffer's words in *Letters and Papers from Prison* still sound shocking, that,

...they really should not [because Bonhoeffer] was merely venturing a tardy theological interpretation of what had already been noticed by poets and novelists, sociologists, and philosophers for decades (Cox 1965:2).

Cox considered Bonhoeffer incapable of definitively answering the question, how do we speak about God without religion, and similarly speak of Him in a secular fashion. Cox concludes that for Bonhoeffer, the problem of "speaking in a secular fashion about God" becomes at least in part a sociological problem, a political issue, and a theological question, which Cox discusses in detail in the concluding chapters of his book. In these chapters, Cox explicates Bonhoeffer's ideas on how to speak in a secular fashion about God (see Cox 1965:241-269). Later in 1966, Peter C. Hodgson argued that Cox's position about Bonhoeffer is scarcely accurate, for Bonhoeffer does not propose to abandon God in turning to the secular city. Instead, it is that God and his actions must be understood with an entirely new focus (see Hodgson 1966:447). In 1985 Cox wrote *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology*, which was hailed by scholars as an attempt to address his unfinished agenda of *The Secular City*.

It is interesting to note that in his 1990 review of *The Secular City: 25 Years later* Cox recalls the following:

We talked a lot about Bonhoeffer that year [during his visit to Berlin], especially about the musings he set down during the last months of his life about the hiddenness of God and the coming of a 'post-religious' age in human history. In the tense and tired Berlin of the early 1960s, that made a lot of sense (Cox 1990:1025).

Here we can note that Cox is merely qualifying what he wrote in *The Secular City*. Still, he argued in 1990 that the central thesis of *The Secular City* was that "secularisation is not everywhere and always an evil preventing powerful religions from acting on their theocratic pretensions" (see Cox 1990:1025). In truth, Cox's appropriation of Bonhoeffer's theology remained unvaried mainly because he primarily sketched his theology only from the *Ethics* and

the *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Cox, as a secularist, (this-worldliness) differed entirely from Bonhoeffer's way of thinking (other-worldliness) even though he was not notably antireligious. Therefore, Cox secular theology allows Christians to think that God cannot be proven, and faith alone in an unknown magnitude can only hold credence when it appears in reality as humanism. Cox purported that there is insufficient evidence for the belief in the supernatural. Cox's reading of the *Letters and Papers from Prison* certainly caused him to see Bonhoeffer as a secularist, thus purporting that there is much discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology. Cox believed that discontinuity existed in the *Letters and Papers from Prison*, viz. the thoughts on transcendence and immanence.

Consequently, in contrast to Bonhoeffer's interpretations of religion in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Cox, posited that God moved from transcendence to immanence through the person of Jesus Christ. When Jesus died, the transcendence of God ceded. Subsequently, Cox's main contention was to prove the discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's thoughts found in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Cox purported that the ideas found in *Letters and Papers from Prison* brought about a "religionless Christianity" – similarly to "God's hiddenness," that is, God, insists on turning the world over to the man as his responsibility (see Cox 1966:259).

The interest in Bonhoeffer's 'non-religious' form of interpretation intensified, causing scholars to call Bonhoeffer the "father of the God-is-dead theology" (see Hamilton 1962:440). This interpretation was based primarily on the reading of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and the *Letters and Papers from Prison*. In later writings, John W. De Gruchy observes that "Bonhoeffer's theology had been hijacked by radicals" who had latched onto the *Letters and Papers from Prison* (see De Gruchy 1997:343). De Gruchy believes that scholars ignored Bonhoeffer's earlier theology, by "re-creating him according to their own image and in the service of their own dubious agenda" (see De Gruchy 1997:343).

The above was true of John Robinson, who employed Bonhoeffer's idea of a 'secular God' and published *Honest to God* (1963) in which he uses Bonhoeffer's phrase 'religionless Christianity' to propagate secular Christianity. In his estimation Rudolf Bultmann implied that this idea – of a "secular God – provoked debates in Germany, particularly in the Hamburg

newspaper, *Die Zeit* with captions, ‘Is God a metaphor?’, ‘Is our image of God dated?’, ‘Is faith in God finished?’”, all questions evoked by Robinson’s book (see Bultmann 1967:256). John de Gruchy hypothesises that the publication of *Honest to God* by John Robinson “significantly changed the perception” of Bonhoeffer (see De Gruchy 1999:93). He assigned the reason for this ‘perception’ to Robinson’s usage of the *Letters and Papers from Prison* as a starting point to interpret Bonhoeffer’s theology (see De Gruchy 1999:93). Conversely, the controversy surrounding the publication of ‘*Honest to God*’ sparked renewed interest in Bonhoeffer, bringing about an assumption of discontinuity in Bonhoeffer’s theology.

Although some suggested that Bonhoeffer advanced the radical theology of secular Christianity and was responsible for the ‘theology of the death of God,’ some theologians still rightly observe that the ideas developed by Bonhoeffer were not new in contemporary theology. Nietzsche was among the first scholars to give expression to this idea.⁴ Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God; he was both frightened and overwhelmed by the senselessness of life. The methodological application of the working hypothesis of God’s nonexistence (*‘etsi deus non daretur’* - Hugo Grotius) created a new reality. The experience of the death of God is a theological as well as a cultural phenomenon within a theological discussion of transcendence (see Mayer 1981:179).

Nietzsche introduced the death-of-God theme in 1882, which most commonly is associated with two of his books *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885) and *Gay Science* (1882), featuring *The Parable of the Madman* (1882) with the following treatise on the death of God.

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? (Nietzsche 1974:181-182).

The death-of-God theme is revisited and given new meaning in the 1960s by various theologians, such as William Hamilton, Thomas J.J. Altiser, and Paul van Buren, after its

⁴ It is important to note that the theology of ‘the death of God’ had existed for quite a while in philosophy and theology, long before Nietzsche.

awakening by Bonhoeffer. The two ‘most publicised heralds’ of the death-of-God theology were William Hamilton and Thomas J. J. Altiser. Together in 1966, they authored an anthology of essays, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (see Dullies 1967:111). Dullies suggests that in William Hamilton’s book in 1961, *The New Essence of Christianity*, the ‘death-of-God’ theology, was already accepted. It was received, in the sense that contemporary humanity was oppressed by a feeling of God’s absence and of the difficulty of speaking about Him, but not in the sense that God did not exist or was utterly beyond our knowledge (see Dullies 1967:111). In the same year that Hamilton published his book, *Time Magazine* printed the article *Is God dead?* It is only later in 1966 that Peter C. Hodgson postulates that Hamilton wanted to speak of a real, irretrievable loss of God. (God is lost, once and for all; he will not return. Hence the metaphor of the death-of-God is precisely appropriate.) Hamilton insisted that what had been intended is more than the absence of God; he wanted to move decisively beyond what he regarded as the neo-orthodox dialectic of the presence and absence of God (see Hodgson 1966:451). In *The Death-of-God Theology* (1968), Alan Richardson posited that Hamilton’s God disappeared when he discovered that God was not a “need-fulfiller” or “problem solver” – and since then Hamilton experienced the sense of the real absence of God (see Richardson 1968 2).

At this juncture, it is essential to draw attention to Bonhoeffer’s phrase ‘religionless Christianity.’ This phrase provoked scholars (both discussed previously and forthcoming) to see discontinuity in Bonhoeffer’s theology. Thomas J.J. Altiser and Paul van Buren intensified the climate of opinion attached to the phrase ‘religionless Christianity.’ They did so without a rationale for offering their interpretation of the words ‘religionless Christianity’ in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. It is important to note that all the scholars focused almost exclusively on the *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* of Bonhoeffer and had no interest in his earlier writings. The implicit assumption is that Bonhoeffer moved away from his earlier books. Although such secondary scholarship did not observe such discontinuity, that was their tacit assumption.

Altiser was conscious of the above assumption – he formed his death-of-God movement with

the implicit assumption that Bonhoeffer moved away from his earlier writings. Altiser was hugely influenced by Hamilton, who disregarded Bonhoeffer's previous books and concentrated solely on *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. In the USA, Altiser is generally regarded as the 'chief prophet' of the death-of-God movement. In his book *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, he declared that the "glad tidings of the death-of-God" was the last and "final, irrevocable event" (see Richardson 1968:3). He believed that God died; God ceased to exist in the transcendent – as a supernatural being – and became fully immanent in the world. For Altiser, the church tried to give God life by the doctrines of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. This conviction was made prominent in 1965 and 1966 issues of *Time* magazine and provoked enough response to make these issues the best-selling in the magazine's history.

Conversely, Paul van Buren who is also associated with the death-of-God theology, was concerned with the linguistic aspects of God's existence and death. Van Buren often cited Bonhoeffer's plea for a nonreligious interpretation of the Gospel, apposite to the world come of age. He had a deep Bonhoefferean concern, particularly for these provocative phrases found in *Letters and Papers from Prison* – but not so much with Bonhoeffer's theology of his earlier writings. He, too, maintained the implicit assumption that Bonhoeffer had moved away from his earlier books, thus occasioning a discontinuity. Van Buren believed that if the only empirically verifiable language is meaningful, all communication that refers to or assumes the reality of God is meaningless since one cannot verify God's existence by any of the five senses. For Buren, one cannot speak of a being who died who never "logically existed" (see Richardson 1968:2).

In 1967 Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* received lots of attention from theologians in the collections of the publication of 'World Come of Age.'⁵ Subsequently, it was during the 1970s that the interest in Bonhoeffer's "analysis of a world that is becoming religionless" quickly reached a verdict on this point – that at least Bonhoeffer was in error (see

⁵ Portions of this book were translated from *Die Mündige Welt*, volumes I-IV, published in 1955-1963.

Bethge 1981:3). Already in 1973, the Synod of the German Evangelical Church⁶ issued an extensive report on the new religious movement of the time that Bonhoeffer awakened – that being a religionless Christianity (see Bethge 1981:3). Bonhoeffer was then labeled as the radical theologian of secular Christianity.

It becomes evident that theological reflections on ‘God in a secular city’ and the death-of-God theologies dominated Bonhoeffer scholarship into the 1960s. This debate on secularisation shifted after the publication of the *Ethics*, which could be seen as Bonhoeffer’s new voice before things he said in *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

2.3 Secondary Scholarship on the Bonhoeffer of the *Ethics*

In the Afterword of *Ethics*, the editors suggest that the 1962 “rearrangement” of *Ethics* and the Bonhoeffer *Biography* by Eberhard Bethge “inaugurated a new phase in the reception of Bonhoeffer’s work”, which stimulated interest beyond⁷ Germany, as far as America and South Africa (see DBWE 6:437). This interest gradually increased after the concerted writings of German scholars Eberhard Bethge, on the rearrangement of the *Ethics*, and Ernst Feil, on the continuity of Bonhoeffer’s theology. Finally, “consensus was established that despite the breakthrough to new insights in the prison letters,” Bonhoeffer’s work “is characterised by a strong element of continuity” (see DBWE 6:438). Bonhoeffer’s work *Ethics* “cannot be devaluated against the prison letters” (see DBWE 6:438). Therefore, *Ethics* could be regarded as a continuation of his earlier writings and was not rendered obsolete after all. However, we have to bear in mind that initially, *Ethics* had drawn more attention from Americans than from German scholars. Larry Rasmussen was the first to try to establish the correlation between *Ethics* and Bonhoeffer’s theology of resistance for an American perception. John W. de Gruchy was the first in South Africa to develop Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* from a South African context and seek its correlation to the apartheid regime in South Africa. By the 1970s, the popularity of *Ethics* eclipsed that of *Letters and Papers from Prison* amongst English readers (see DBWE

⁶ Harvey Cox and Helmut Aichelin were also present at this Synod and submitted a report to the Synod, indicating that Bonhoeffer’s proposition of ‘religionless’ clearly makes no sense. They were bewildered about what this ‘religionless’ implied.

⁷ It is only later that Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* was given thought in Britain in 2013 by Keith Clements (DBWE 6:438).

6:438). The question of continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's thinking is again raised. Some suggest that significant discontinuity is evident, namely on two fronts: the secular thought in *Letters and Papers from Prison* as compared to the *Ethics*, and the civil disobedience in the *Ethics* compared to the pacifism in the *Discipleship*. Others suggest that some continuity is nevertheless evident. The *Letters and Papers from Prison* are misunderstood if not read together with the *Ethics*. I will notice that the discontinuity and continuity of Bonhoeffer's theology are not so much in Bonhoeffer's views but preferably in the interpretation of the different opinions expressed in his corpus.

Consequently, from an American perspective – Stanley Hauerwas acknowledged that biographically from the very onset of “Bonhoeffer's life and theology he was attempting to develop a theological politics” (see Hauerwas 2002:17). He claims that one could identify continuity in both Bonhoeffer's academic and spiritual writings *vis-à-vis* a formulation of theological politics that culminates in *Ethics* – with activist ideas. Hauerwas also proposes that “Bonhoeffer's work from beginning to end was the attempt to reclaim the visibility of the church” (see Hauerwas 2002:18). Hauerwas contends that Bonhoeffer wrote *Ethics* when he had no church connection (see Hauerwas 2002:25). Bonhoeffer felt that the church “had simply lost the resources to reclaim its space in the world. How that space can be reclaimed – not only in the face of the Nazis but when time seems ‘normal’ – became the heart of Bonhoeffer's theological politics” (see Hauerwas 2002:25). Hauerwas asserts that in 1940 when the Gestapo closed, the Finkenwalde Seminary Bonhoeffer was without an ecclesial appointment, and it was during this time of his life – when he had so to speak no church connection that he could develop his theological politics found in the book of *Ethics*. For Hauerwas Bonhoeffer's political opposition to the Nazis induced a fundamental shift in his theology since the time of involvement with the Abwehr's plot to kill Hitler. This meant that having no church connection, Bonhoeffer turned again to his passion for theology, beginning work on what we now know as his *Ethics* (see Hauerwas 2002:25). In favour of a definite continuity, Hauerwas suggests that continuity from his academic to his spiritual writings remained mainly in a formulation for a political theology (see Hauerwas 2002:24).

German theologian Wolfgang Huber also developed a keen interest in Bonhoeffer's theology in *Ethics*. His interest converged on the ethic of responsibility for life in the context of modernity. In 1982 he edited *Ethics in Real Life: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's position on the Jews and its contemporary relevance* that showed his interest in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* was evolving. It was only in 1990 – the same year he became the chair on the editorial board of the *DBW* – that there is an indication of Huber's interaction with Bonhoeffer's text. In 2012 Huber continued to express his interest in *Ethics* when the occasion arose at the XIth International Bonhoeffer Congress to address *The Theological Profile of Bonhoeffer's Political Resistance* (2012). In this context, Huber could consolidate his ideas on Bonhoeffer, mainly developing Bonhoeffer's discontent toward the church because of its frequent lack of political resistance. Huber (2012) believed that a “theology of resistance” could be teased out of Bonhoeffer's writing during the time at Finkenwalde and Bonhoeffer's active call for the church to take a stand against the current repression. In his 2014 article *Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Christian existence on the edge of the future* Huber illustrated continuity between *Ethics* and Bonhoeffer's earlier spiritual writings. He did so by emphasising that Bonhoeffer's life characterised aspects of “continuous movement of return and a new beginning,” and this “characteristic of his theology consisted of a priority of questions over answers” (see Huber 2014:974). For Huber, Bonhoeffer's first movement is in his earliest spiritual writing, *Discipleship*. *Discipleship* is a return to the Bible and a new beginning with the *Sermon on the Mount*. Huber says in *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer “describes the existential experience of turning back to the Bible, in 1931/2, that means before the beginning of the Nazi Regime”. and giving the church a “clear direction for his responsibility in church and society” (see Huber 2014:975). The second movement is Bonhoeffer's spiritual writing, *Life Together*. After returning from a pastorate in London, Bonhoeffer became a part of the church struggle and also engaged in preparing young theologians for the ministry at Finkenwalde, to which end he applied *Life Together*. The third return was to politics; the new beginning was a conspiracy – *Ethics* “emerged from this situation” (see Huber 2014:976). Huber believed that there is substantial continuity between *Ethics* and Bonhoeffer's earlier spiritual writings, stressing that they were of “an extraordinary theological significance” (Huber 2014:976).

Florian Schmitz, a German theologian whose current research deals with ‘*The Church and the Jewish Question*,’ especially on the phrase ‘to put a spoke in the wheel itself,’ agrees that,

If one wants to describe the relation of Christians to the world in *Ethics*, one particular concept is most suitable: the concept of *responsibility*. The Christian is responsible for the world (Schmitz 2013:150).

Schmitz indicates that there is a noticeable discontinuity between *Discipleship* and *Ethics* – Bonhoeffer’s shifts his emphasis in *Ethics* – so that the real significance shifts onto our responsibility concerning state and society. Schmitz says that “many researchers have compared *Discipleship* and *Ethics* and concluded that, with his decision in support of the conspiracy, Bonhoeffer retreated from essential theological concepts” in his *Discipleship* and Bonhoeffer was willing “to put a spoke in the wheel itself” (see Schmitz 2013:147).

Keith Clement, a British theologian, and a public ethicist were involved in the editing in the English Translation Series of the *DBW*. Clements alludes to the discontinuity in the reception of Bonhoeffer’s earlier writings and *Ethics* and how it was expressed in several ways:

A number of us whose first encounters with Bonhoeffer had been through the prison letters and *Cost of Discipleship* now found ourselves particularly drawn to the *Ethics*, and I think it fair to say that the bulk of the serious work done in Britain on Bonhoeffer in the past forty years has either been on the *Ethics* or the ethical implications of the Bonhoeffer corpus as a whole. Certainly, a good number of the PhD theses written in Britain have been on Bonhoeffer’s ethics, and so too the more significant published studies (Clements 2013:29).

In the 1960s, political developments in South Africa prompted Beyers Naudé to assume the role of a theologian getting involved in the struggle against apartheid and also engaged in the discourse on apartheid using Bonhoeffer’s activist theology. Naudé was among the first activists that took this stand. Beside his encounter with the Confessing Church in Germany and limited or no interaction with the theology of Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*, Naudé had no other known dealings with Bonhoeffer. While visiting South Africa in 1973, Eberhard Bethge labeled Naudé the “South African Bonhoeffer” because of his willingness to stand up against an oppressive government system. Naudé’s life was influenced directly by Bonhoeffer’s theology, as found in *Ethics* and particularly by the similarity he found between the Confessing Church and the confession of guilt by the DRC in South Africa. Naudé was the only South African who attended the first Bonhoeffer Congress in 1971, in Kaiserswerth, Germany. He was influential

in introducing the theology of Bonhoeffer to John de Gruchy. On one occasion, Naudé visited the USA as the CI director, and amidst other duties followed De Gruchy's progress of his Bonhoeffer studies in the USA. After his studies in the USA, John De Gruchy wrote prolifically on Bonhoeffer, theorising that the theology and witness of Bonhoeffer could be traced in the church's earlier struggle against apartheid. Although Bonhoeffer's theology reached limited circles, his impetus remained important as a dialogue partner for the church in South Africa in the historical phase in which democracy was put to the test (see De Gruchy 1996:355). De Gruchy's influential writings on Bonhoeffer's theology suggested that two primary Bonhoeffer texts could help us understand Bonhoeffer's grounds for joining the German resistance. The first was 'The Church and the Jewish Question' and the second, on 'The Structure of Responsible Life,' rendered in *Ethics*.

De Gruchy suggests that the contemplation of a responsible life in *Ethics* proposes risks – risking acting against injustices and taking the side of the oppressed. Bonhoeffer's reflections on 'The Structure of Responsible Life' which became central to his *Ethics*. The need to venture would later become seminal in South African theology, no more so than in the drafting of the *Kairos Document* in 1986, which categorically rejected the apartheid regime as tyrannical, and unequivocally called on Christians to side with the oppressed in their struggle for justice. Although this reflected a long tradition in Christian ethics, it was Bonhoeffer's writings and his courageous action that inspired many to affirm the message of the *Kairos Document* (*passim* in De Gruchy 2016).

From the secondary scholarship discussed above, I deduced that through the publication of the *Ethics*, a new debate emerged, which steered the discussion on secularisation in a different direction. My implicit assumption is that the Bonhoeffer of spiritual writings is not the same as presented in *Ethics*. Bonhoeffer, in his later books, is an activist interested in resistance against Hitler as conceptualised in his *Ethics*. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer endeavoured to give faith a non-theological language and show the worldly stance of Christianity. Thus, seen from the perspective of Bonhoeffer's life, in *Ethics*, his theology seems to have changed more radically from pacifism into a more profound concern for resistance against Nazi Germany. Those, as

mentioned earlier, then drew more significant concerns amongst scholarship debates on the continuity of Bonhoeffer's theology. Because if the Bonhoeffer of the *Letters and Papers from Prison* is not *bona fide*, then the Bonhoeffer of *Ethics* is now real, and how does that relate to his spiritual writings and his ecclesiastical work? During his time at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer became an ambassador for the Confessing Church that, in turn, became the hub of conversation on theological resistance against Hitler – his main task was political. In the *Afterword* of *Ethics*, the editors Ilse Tödt, Heinz Eduard Tödt, Ernst Feil and Clifford Green enunciate the idea that,

[Discipleship became the] guiding theme in Bonhoeffer's faith, his behaviour, and his role as a preacher and theological teacher in the Church Struggle (see DBWE 6:414).

Discipleship also “grew out of work both before and during Bonhoeffer's time in Finkenwalde preacher's seminary, was also contended to convey to the young theologians of the confessing church the spiritual prerequisites for standing fast under repression and miserable circumstances” (see DBWE6:414). Many of the ideas expressed in *Discipleship* re-emerge apparently in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* – “the substantive issue addressed in both cases is the same” (see DBWE 6:414).

The debate on continuity in Bonhoeffer's theology as traced from his earlier spiritual writings to the *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* would appear to go backwards in terms of the chronology as interpreted by scholars and their interest in the later writings; as illustrated in *Ethics*. In dealing with responsible action, Bonhoeffer validates *Discipleship's* ‘Sermon on the Mount’ as a call to “human historical action” (see DBWE 6:244). In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer chooses the domain of politics as “particularly pertinent to historical action” because it validates the sayings in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ about “self-denial and love of enemies” and for one who “acts politically” (see DBWE 6:245). *Ethics* becomes an example of one who acts politically. Bonhoeffer stresses that only when we understand God's love for the world, which includes political action, will we assume responsibility – “Political action means taking on responsibility” (see DBWE 6:244-245).

Bonhoeffer's stance on ‘political action’ and ‘taking responsibility’ extends the issue of continuity even further. This debate on Bonhoeffer's resistance against Hitler's totalitarian

regime stimulated a whole different discourse because it was picked up not only in Europe and England but also stimulated discussions elsewhere, including the USA, by black theologians and then of course even in South Africa. Bonhoeffer was determined to call the Nazi state to account (concerning the plan to kill Adolf Hitler). Bonhoeffer's answer to the crime of the murdering innocent and defenseless human beings he summarised in the following way in *Ethics*:

The first right of natural life is the protection of bodily life from arbitrary killing. We must speak of arbitrary killing wherever innocent life is deliberately killed. The killing of a criminal who has encroached on another life is, of course, not arbitrary (DBWE 6:189).

Bonhoeffer's stance on the Nazi State fortified the theory of discontinuity from his earlier spiritual writings to *Ethics*, now presenting a double-change from the pacifist Bonhoeffer of the late 1930s to a Bonhoeffer who would be willing to kill Hitler as suggested in his *Ethics*. De Gruchy remarks that "the significance of Bonhoeffer's life and thought" was further obscured "by the apparent contradiction between [Bonhoeffer's] pacifism during the mid-1930s" and also by [Bonhoeffer's] "involvement in the attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Bonhoeffer was a riddle" (see De Gruchy 1999:93). The surrender of France to Germany on June 17, 1940, was a turning point in the life and theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bethge attributes this moment to when "Bonhoeffer's double life began. He was acting out of an inner necessity for which his church as yet had no formulas" (Bethge 2010:681, 682). Later Edwin Robertson would depict Bonhoeffer as a little Christian man who became a man of his time. Bonhoeffer's involvement in the conspiracy required him to abandon many things that his Christian life demanded. The contemplation of killing Hitler ultimately led to Bonhoeffer's 'double life.' Edwin Robertson describes Bonhoeffer's change from pacifism to activism like this:

Little by little this Christian man became completely a man of his time. His involvement in the conspiracy would require the abandoning of much that Christian life demands – expert lying built up gradually into closely woven deception, and ultimately the willingness to kill (Robertson 1988:175).

The growing realisation that continuity is a dominant feature of Bonhoeffer's writing initially prompted scholars to return their attention to his earlier books. This move can be seen in

dissertations written from here on and represents an attempt to correlate Bonhoeffer's church struggle, his resistance against Hitler, and the development of his theology (DBWE 6:438-439).

2.4 Biographical studies on Bonhoeffer's theological development

Bethge did the earliest biographical studies on Bonhoeffer in his 1961 Alden Turnhill lectures titled *The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology*. In these lectures, Bethge also addressed the question of continuity between his earlier writings *Discipleship* and *Life Together* and a further issue for discontinuity in his early theology.

To discredit any allegation of discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology – as early as in the first edition of his biography of Bonhoeffer (1970)⁸ – Eberhard Bethge set out to establish biographical continuity in the development of Bonhoeffer's theology. He outlines Bonhoeffer's theology starting with his studies of the history of religion and philosophy at Tübingen University. Bonhoeffer's theology and views changed after he spent time in Rome, where he developed a deep understanding and appreciation of the church, which still lasted when he enrolled at the University of Berlin. The apparent shift in Bonhoeffer's theology became apparent around this time. Bethge often asserts that Bonhoeffer had a keen appreciation toward his Berlin lecturers and was affected by them more powerfully than by church life (see Bethge 1976:66). The change came during the tutelage of Harnack. Harnack had a life-long influence on Bonhoeffer. Still, Bonhoeffer did not formulate 'his liberal theology' then, but his theology came under the influence of Barth much later to the dismay of Harnack.' Even so, his time at Berlin allowed him to lay a foundation for the shaping of his future theology: a faith which not only knew God but the reality of God. Bonhoeffer was able to obtain (during his 1941 visits to Barth) the latest volume (II/I) of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, on the doctrine of God published in 1940.

However, after the publication of Bethge's biography, Bonhoeffer scholars agreed that the *bona fide* Bonhoeffer is not to be found only in the *Ethics* and *Letters and Paper from Prison*.

⁸ This biography was translated and abridged from the third German edition, by Eric Mosbacher, et al. (ed. Edwin Robertson) and also published as *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, and Contemporary* in 1970. An unabridged edition, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* was revised and edited by Victoria J. Barnett (2000).

The main argument Bethge made in his biography was indeed that there is more continuity in Bonhoeffer's writings. The main reason Bethge produced the biography was to ask: What about the continuity to be found in Bonhoeffer's theological development that comes into fruition in his other earlier writings? This not only shifted the attention away from the prison writings but also stimulated people to revisit Bonhoeffer's other books. These included the spiritual books of the late and early 1930s like *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* and even the *Creation* and the *Christology* lectures. Despite this considerable dissent escalated against the distinct discontinuity: the contention was that there was substantial continuity in the Bonhoeffer's corpus, and given this continuity in Bonhoeffer's theological thought, it became essential to associate his early writings with his later books.

At the first International Bonhoeffer Conference (1971), the International Bonhoeffer Society⁹ was established – prompted by Bethge's biography – to investigate the continuity in Bonhoeffer's theology and to prepare a response to those insisting on discontinuity. The suggestion to study Bonhoeffer's theology holistically and not just partially stimulated various scholars to examine diverse Bonhoeffer topics. The IBS conferences reacted by exploring different issues relevant within its specific contexts of theology and different aspects of Bonhoeffer's theology and their relevance to different settings. The IBS conferences were held every four years in different countries, with the 1976 conference in Geneva. The 1980 Bonhoeffer conference hosted at Oxford University geared itself to discuss Bonhoeffer's existing influence in the church, specifically within the modern world. The 1984 conference 'Bonhoeffer, Barmen and the Confession of Christ today' held in Hirschluch in the German Democratic Republic featured John W. de Gruchy as the inaugural speaker. De Gruchy highlighted specifically Bonhoeffer's witness for Christ. He emphasised that for Bonhoeffer, the church existed as a witness for Christ in deeds of solidarity and with the powerless

⁹ This renewed interest on continuity in Bonhoeffer's writings was also awakened in the 1980s and incited Wolfgang Huber to collect writings in a German Critical edition. The underlying assumption of the DBWE series was that one could track continuity in Bonhoeffer's theology – arguing that this indeed is the same person in the early and the later writings. Consequently, in 2013 the first *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues* volume was printed – with leading Bonhoeffer scholars – corresponding with the print/translation of the final volume of the DBWE. The volume was designed to address a later generation of Bonhoeffer scholars.

oppressed. At the 1988 conference, the opening speaker Dr Allan Boesak explored the possibilities as to what Bonhoeffer meant to him in the unfolding of his theology. The next conference held at the Union Theological Seminary in New York (1992) concentrated on future theology and the life of the church with the overarching theme, 'Bonhoeffer's legacy for the future: Responsibility in the World.' In 1996 Cape Town hosted the seventh International Bonhoeffer Congress, where South African scholars involved in the fight against apartheid concerned themselves with the question 'Are we still of any use?' Bonhoeffer's contribution to the church's political engagement and the relevance of his theology in South Africa was also addressed. The 2000 Conference held in Berlin discussed the issue of 'Religion and the shape of Christianity in the 21st Century.' The subsequent conferences were held in Rome and Prague and dealt with the topics of humanism, fundamentalism, secularism, and the political theology of Bonhoeffer with the overall theme drawn from 'A Spoke in the Wheel: Reconsidering the Political Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.' The presenters pursued the relevance of Bonhoeffer's political theology, ethics for the Christian, and the church in a world characterised by an escalating gap between the rich and the poor. The pertinent issue was: What is the role of the church in all of this?

A *leitmotif* emerges from the themes of the IBS conferences; viz. can one find continuity in Bonhoeffer's theology? From early on De Gruchy was one of those among the many Bonhoeffer scholars who also contended, "that there is a remarkable continuity in Bonhoeffer's thought which can be discerned from its early expression in *Sanctorum Communio* through to the *Ethics* and prison letters" (De Gruchy 2000:81). John de Gruchy asserts that it was Ronald Gregor Smith, a friend and an interpreter of Bonhoeffer's theology, who helped shape "Bethge's approach" with its emphasis on continuity (De Gruchy 2000:81). De Gruchy also infers that Smith "recognised the importance of Bonhoeffer's earlier theology [in *Sanctorum Communio*], insisting that the revolution in his thought had to be seen in relation to his earlier life and writings" (De Gruchy 2000:81). It was here that Smith believed one could find the continuity. Ronald Gregor Smith was resolute to translate *Sanctorum Communio* and have it published in English. "As it turned out, this was a very significant event in the interpretation

of Bonhoeffer” (see De Gruchy 2007:357). De Gruchy affirms,

It was becoming evident, through Bethge’s work and that of others, viz. Smith, that Bonhoeffer’s later theology could only be understood as a development that, for all its radical newness, already had its foundations in *Sanctorum Communio* and his Habilitation *Act and Being* (De Gruchy 2007:357).

Historian and theologian Robert P. Ericksen, who authored *Theologians under Hitler*, says that he “understands the desire of scholars to find consistency in Bonhoeffer” (see Ericksen 2013:133). Ericksen acknowledges that one cannot ignore Bonhoeffer’s “roots in the Christian theology he studied in his early years” (see Ericksen 2013:133). He cautions that “our desire to connect the early and late Bonhoeffer should not allow us to deny that he changed and grew in important ways during his experience” with Nazism (see Ericksen 2013:133). Ericksen has a deep respect for Eberhard Bethge mostly because of Bethge’s response to the Jewish question and argued “that Bonhoeffer really did undergo a change in his attitude toward Jews between 1933 and 1945. In other words, he argued for discontinuity based on Bonhoeffer’s experience” (see Ericksen 2013:134). Ericksen also states that it is Bethge “who labeled Bonhoeffer’s ideas written from Tegel Prison a ‘New Theology’ and therefore, Erickson thinks we should take Bethge and Bonhoeffer seriously” (Ericksen 2013:134).

In the same way, Victoria J. Barnett confesses that in interpreting Bonhoeffer’s works, “it is somewhat unique” because she has to look at all aspects, such as, “at sentences, translation choices and the placement of semicolons” (see Barnett 2013:95). As an interpreter, Barnett expresses that when we are “up close” to Bonhoeffer, one can see “major turning points” in his life ... “Bonhoeffer himself apparently struggled sometimes with making decisions” (see Barnett 2013:95). Barnett also deduces that the “fragmentary nature of his life,” exposed continuously “another aspect that emerges from these volumes:¹⁰ the portrait of a man of continuity and consistency” (see Barnett 2013:95).

Joseph McGarry argues for continuity in Bonhoeffer’s early theology and its influence on *Discipleship* agrees with Bethge “that Bonhoeffer’s thought was always in transition, always

¹⁰ Victoria Barnett was general editor to *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940–1945* (DBWE 16) and one of a team of translators of *Letters and Papers from Prison* (DBWE 8).

maturing, and yet always progressing along a specific pathway” (see McGarry 2014:13). McGarry maintains that the above position was not only right of Bethge but also others who sought to find continuity in Bonhoeffer’s theological development. He alludes to the work of John Godsey, John Phillips, Hanfried Müller, Clifford Green, and Ernst Feil, who all sought to find some kind of continuity in Bonhoeffer’s theology. John Godsey, the first and most prominent interpreter of Bonhoeffer’s theology and its development, argued for “fundamental continuity between Bonhoeffer’s early and late writings” but still recognised Bonhoeffer’s most crucial development found in his prison writings (see McGarry 2014:13). Additionally, Phillips contended for theological discontinuity in Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology and Christology. Inversely Hanfried Müller gave a socialist interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s theology in his book *Von der Kirche zur Welt*. In his lectures ‘Concerning the Reception and Interpretation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,’ he drew attention to this crucial question [of interpretation] if continuity or discontinuity existed in Bonhoeffer’s theology. McGarry suggests that Clifford Green’s¹¹ monumental work *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality* in 1999 “was an important step in arguing for a fundamental continuity,” as was Ernst Feil’s 1971 work “*Die Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s. Hermeneutik – Christologie – Weltverständnis*” (see McGarry 2014:14).

Since the engagement within trying to find continuity in Bonhoeffer’s theology, scholars still struggle to find consensus amongst themselves. Eugene C. Bianchi, a Professor of Religion Emeritus at Emory University, considers Bonhoeffer a far more traditional thinker. Also, while manifesting a definite modification in his outlook, the broader range of his writing does not disclose a radical discontinuity. Bianchi believes that there are new insights and shifting emphases in Bonhoeffer’s books rather than a significant shift in his theology (see Bianchi 1967:801). Bianchi suggests that what is worth noting “is the continuity of Bonhoeffer’s thought concerning the Church as the corporate form of Christ in the world” (see Bianchi 1967:806). This idea Bonhoeffer deals within his *The Communion of Saints* with the notion of Christ existing as a community. Bonhoeffer’s concept of ‘being fully’ as a church community

¹¹ When dealing with the discontinuity in Bonhoeffer’s theology Clifford Green concentrates on the biographical aspect in contrast to Ernst Feil’s accent on Bonhoeffer’s continuity which he asserts can be found throughout Bonhoeffer’s writings.

cultivate[s] an intensity of discipleship which later come across strongly in *The Cost of Discipleship*. *The Cost of Discipleship*, though reflecting Bonhoeffer's period of disillusionment with the German Church under Hitler, is a rejection not of sound worldliness for a man come of age, but rather a renunciation of the sick, unevangelical worldliness existing in the Church itself. Although Bonhoeffer later recognised the dangers of an overly withdrawn life, [reflected in his *Life Together*] he was prepared, even in his prison letters, to stand by what he had written previously in *The Cost of Discipleship* (see Bianchi 1967:808). Although Bonhoeffer's work *Life Together* reflected a call for a life of prayer and communal spirituality, this work also "stressed the need for prayer, silence, mutual confession, and service, as well as communal worship of word and sacrament in the ecclesial community" (see Bianchi 1967:809). This life of an inner 'arcane' discipline advocated by Bonhoeffer almost became a 'necessary evil' for him when he found himself incarcerated in Berlin's Tegel Prison. Bianchi suggests that "a deep and unpretentious prayer life undergirds his prison papers," – thus implying continuity in Bonhoeffer's writings (see Bianchi 1967:809).

Charles Marsh, author of *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of his Theology* is also of the opinion that a *leitmotif* of continuity does exist in Bonhoeffer's corpus as early as *Sanctorum Communio*:

Bonhoeffer's philosophical interests are especially evident in his doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio* (1927), and his habilitation thesis, *Act and Being* (1930), both containing sustained discussions of seminal figures from modern German philosophy, but they are also found in numerous lectures, essays, and occasional pieces written during his years as a lecturer at Berlin (Marsh 1994:x).

Marsh concludes that Bonhoeffer continued his trend of thought even after he had left the Berlin University but that he still reacted to "the increasing demands of the church crises" (see Marsh 1994: xi). *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Life Together*, and *Ethics* "form a kind of trilogy echoing the triadic shape of Bonhoeffer's theology, Christology, community, and selfhood" (see Marsh 1994: xi). Marsh suggests that the subtext of Bonhoeffer's earlier writings "illuminates (perhaps surprisingly) the sophistication, complexity, and continuity of his thought" (see Marsh 1994: xi).

It could be accurate to say that most, if not all, of Bonhoeffer's texts, lead us to *Letters and*

Papers from Prison. The whole point of this biography is to show that the early roots of Bonhoeffer's ideas in *Sanctorum Communio*, *Act and Being*, *Life Together*, and *Ethics* all converge in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. As I conclude the emphasis on continuity of Bonhoeffer's theology and not Christology, I have to consider whether there is development in his thinking after all.

2.5 Is there development in Bonhoeffer's thinking, after all?

If the above issue were assumed, my task would be to discover or rediscover where and when development took place in Bonhoeffer's thinking. Amongst those who emphasise continuity, there are still enthusiasts who argue that if there is no radical discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology, at least there should be a development in his thinking. The following ways are often suggested as to how Bonhoeffer's thought developed: As he developed academically a noticeable change took place in his religiosity too; as he studied under different lecturers learning new ideas his theology could have been contextual; his personal religious life could have changed, that is, simply contextually; a biographic change could have occurred as he matured in age; emotional changes could have happened in his life as he was faced with different challenges (e.g., being prison); lastly it could have been a simple change in interest from academic theology to ecclesiology – a more fulfilling church life in the ministry.

John D. Godsey was among the first Bonhoeffer scholars who maintained that Bonhoeffer developed new ideas during his time in prison by saying:

The new developments in Bonhoeffer's thinking during two years of imprisonment were disclosed in occasional letters to his close friend Eberhard Bethge (Godsey 1957:139).

The 1960s brought about a fertile secular mood in theology, during which Bonhoeffer's phrase, 'secular Christianity' arose in debates. Given a dearth of publication on the topic of development in Bonhoeffer's theology, John A. Phillips considered it worth investigation. He viewed Bonhoeffer as having embodied a "bastardised theological heritage," with his struggles with Protestant theology determining its "present-day shape" (see Phillips 1967:28).

Another trend of thought was developed by Martin Rumscheidt, who said every significant "change (*Wende*) in Bonhoeffer's thought ... occurred in the milieu of Berlin" (see Rumscheidt

1999:51). Bonhoeffer's "theological development was greatly influenced by forces and factors beyond the narrow confines of the theological academy" (see Rumscheidt 1999:51). De Gruchy identifies different phases in Bonhoeffer's theological development, beginning with ecclesiology, then focusing on Christology, and finally grappling with the reality of "the world come of age" (see De Gruchy 1999:99). De Gruchy states that,

it becomes evident, through Bethge's work and that of others, that Bonhoeffer's later theology and writings could only be understood as a development that, for all its radical newness, already had its foundations in *Sanctorum Communio* and his *Habilitation Act and Being* (De Gruchy 1999:99).

In later years, even though he attributed most of the current understanding of Bonhoeffer's development to Bethge, De Gruchy acknowledges that

... although systematic in his interpretation and character of Bonhoeffer, much of Bonhoeffer's theology was founded on key insights [by Bethge] that informed his thought throughout its development, the challenge of Bonhoeffer's theology lay in its provisional character and his ongoing attempt to reflect on the probing question 'Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?' (De Gruchy 2007:358). And such detailed attention to the development of his thought at each stage of his life in its various historical moments continued throughout [Bethge's biography] (De Gruchy 2007:360).

One can deduce that multiple emotional changes marked Bonhoeffer's life from circumstances enforced upon him. Richard H. Bliese asserts that Bonhoeffer disliked,

Showing emotions in public that had been frowned upon at home by his father. For whatever reason, a significant change took place in Bonhoeffer, which was observable to friends, family, and students. This change can be traced back to the periods when he began his work at the university, in the church, and in the ecumenical movement. Also as a result of this conversion, a new confessional identity emerged that reshaped his ecclesiology, led to his concern for discipleship, and gave him new eyes to see the reality of the church as Christ existing as community (Bliese 2008:56).

Although some scholars said that Bonhoeffer's theological development was primarily contextual – engaging the specific human-cultural-ethical issues of the present era – there is also an admission that some emotional changes occurred in Bonhoeffer's life (see Green 2013:216-217). It is suggested that as times changed – because Bonhoeffer was a contextual theologian who often responded profoundly to the changing climate of theology – there was no development during this time of his life. Even so, there must have been some development in his person – although Bonhoeffer was notorious for his stoic aristocratic personality, according to which one should not show emotion, and did not change even if one changed.

Then he fell in love – and one must conclude that he changed.

Bonhoeffer's first moments of 'real-life' he experienced when visiting the Abyssinian Baptist Church in the USA. He experienced the realities of living in Harlem and encountered the poverty of Harlem at first hand. When Bonhoeffer returned from America, his theology on the visibility of the Christian God, changed dramatically and confirmed, in his thinking, that "the great dying hour [had] come for Christianity" in Germany (see Bethge 1967:26). This experience shaped the development of his theology for later in life when he had to address the Jewish question in Germany. Bonhoeffer saw at first-hand the community he envisioned recounted by a fellow student, Myles Horton, at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in America. This part of Bonhoeffer's life is not often recorded in scholarly literature. Reggie Williams records the following of Bonhoeffer's experience while being in the USA:

The captivating passion of the black Christ was invigorating, and a source through which Bonhoeffer came to identify with African Americans. One Sunday morning after teaching Sunday School that day Bonhoeffer lingered for a time, excited to talk about that day at church. To Horton's surprise, Bonhoeffer was quite emotional; this was out of character for Bonhoeffer's typically logical, unemotive temperament. Horton remembered Bonhoeffer claiming that 'the only time he had experienced true religion in the United States' was in black churches, and he 'was convinced that it was only among blacks who were oppressed that there could be any real religion (Williams 2013:168).

Bonhoeffer scholar Clifford Green believes Bonhoeffer's theology to be contextual:

... born a child of the modern world nearly a millennium after Anselm and four hundred years after Luther, Bonhoeffer's paradigm marks a shift from the intra-subjective orientation of the late Medieval-Reformation paradigm to the social, public, and political world of the current age. Like his predecessors, Bonhoeffer's theology is contextual, engaging the characteristic human-cultural-ethical issues of the present era (Green 2013:216-217).

Florian Schmitz similarly proposes that Bonhoeffer's theology in *Discipleship* and *Ethics* changed regularly. Schmitz suggests that,

it can be said that Bonhoeffer develops contextual theology by getting involved in new situations, and by questioning, updating, and continually developing sovereign theological convictions that pervade his entire work (Schmitz 2013:152).

Consequently, "it can be said that *Discipleship* and *Ethics* are updates of these unchangeable basic assumptions depending on their specific manner and their having emerged out of very different historical situations" (see Schmitz 2013:152).

In contrast to the above assumption, a particular circle of Bonhoeffer scholars suggests that there is more continuity than seems apparent, and there is also a development in Bonhoeffer's thinking. For example, Bonhoeffer's concentration on the Christian community in *Life Together* changed to a genre of trauma¹² in comparison to a highly critical genre in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Alternatively, one could also make the argument that both genres sound the same. One could ask the question as to what happened to the kind of indifferent intellectualism found in *Act and Being*, which does not look the same as the genre of *Life Together* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. If these are indeed traces of discontinuity, one also has to ask: Are there perhaps other developments affecting Bonhoeffer's theology? In the ranks of the IBS and corpus of the serious Bonhoeffer of *Letters and Papers from Prison*, where are the voices asking whether there was not still discontinuity, despite attempts to find continuity? If discontinuity did not exist, at the very least, a development in his thinking should be discerned and understood. In certain circles of secondary scholarship, the growth in Bonhoeffer's thought is not emphasised much as the continuity in his theology.

There is an apparent change from his earliest writings to his conversion, where it was no longer a matter of intellectual grasp of excellent subject matter but a shift to issues of personal involvement. Moreover, this influenced the lectures – not *Act and Being*, in which Bonhoeffer tailored his lectures toward the kind of response he elicited from the students. He engaged them on walks and an almost monastic lifestyle. This was indeed a change in style but also terms of content. The other kinds of change in thinking concerned the change in his understanding of theology – not so much his ecclesiology but how to appropriate academic theology. Academic theology cannot be a remote entity from the church in the same way that liberal theology had been practised before that time. Bonhoeffer also changed his thinking on the role of Christianity, viz. from an established religion to a participatory religion in Germany that could speak on behalf of a church whose understanding of church was not just marginal, but would lose its voice after the war. Bonhoeffer also envisaged the embodiment of a community of the

¹² I classify *Life Together* as a genre of trauma for the following reason: the premature abolition of the community resulted in the little book *Life Together* (Munich, 1939; Eng. Tr., 1955), which achieved the biggest distribution of any of Bonhoeffer's books in his lifetime. He would probably never have written it had the Gestapo not interfered (Bethge 1967).

cross as participatory, with a tangible presence. His thinking on the church's mandate changed almost drastically.

This idea of a change in the church's mandate is best reflected in his *Ethics*. It becomes more radical in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, which demonstrates his understanding of how church and world, that is, church and society are related. In this regard, there is a definite discontinuity. The more significant issue then is whether Bonhoeffer changed his understanding of the empirical church, or whether his knowledge of the church itself changed since *Sanctorum Communio*. Bonhoeffer's shift from an understanding of the practical church – concerning the world as a community – to a church-related to the world, can be found categorically in *Sanctorum Communio*.

More likely, Bonhoeffer's shift was progressive because his first mission was to serve the congregations in London still. In Finkenwalde, he suddenly loses himself with his students, and the idea of a confessing church disappears. Finkenwalde becomes the birthplace, where Bonhoeffer struggles with the concept of activism. After the closing down of the seminary at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer's circle dwindled until he ended up in prison alone. It becomes evident that the prison corpus and the Bonhoeffer of Tübingen and Berlin changed in his understanding of the church to the society. Bonhoeffer grappled with ideas as to what community was and what the role of the church should be in society. In *Discipleship* and *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer describes the church's functions in different ways. He describes the church community as visible as a church in the world; and also described as “the visible church community of God on earth, spatial images [of the church] cannot be avoided, the church occupies a certain space in the world” (see DBWE 6, 1990:62). Florian Schmitz (2013:150) accentuates that while being incarcerated Bonhoeffer stressed that,

[The] Christian is responsible for the world [and that the] essential character of the Christian church [is that] the church is church only when it is there for others; and participates in the worldly tasks of life in the community [as set out in the *Letters and Papers from Prison*] (see also DBWE 8:503).

One may conclude that Bonhoeffer understood that the church changed, but the question then remains: Does his understanding of Christology change? Is Bonhoeffer moving more toward a

theology of the cross, and how does these impact his core understanding of the Lutheran *capax infiniti* (found in his early writings) – can the finite contain the infinite? In Bonhoeffer’s later theology of *Letters and Papers from Prison*, he presents God as the one who “consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross” (see DBWE 8:479). Experiencing “Jesus’ ‘being for others’ is the experience of transcendence.” Consequently, this relationship that we have with God is our “new life in ‘being there for others,’ through participation in the being of Jesus” (see DBWE 8:501). For Bonhoeffer, the transcendence of Jesus is not the “‘infinite,’ unattainable task at hand, but the neighbour within reach in any given situation: God in the human form [*capax infiniti*], the human being for others, the Crucified one” (see DBWE 8:501). Therefore, given Bonhoeffer’s augmentation on the theology of the cross, there was increasing – on Bonhoeffer’s part – the recognition of the form of opposites (*sub contrario*),¹³ that is, that the cross conceals the saving presence of God. The view Bonhoeffer expressed is, yes, the finite can contain the infinite but only *sub contrario* – only revealed in its opposite. In connection to this thought, God’s glory is seen in the cross, not the resurrection. Aubert suggests, “after having noted that humanity finds God at the cross, we can now consider Bonhoeffer’s Christology” (see Aubert 2011:53). It is here (in his letters) that we can understand Bonhoeffer’s Christology. Through “God’s sufferings humanity receives strength – but, paradoxically, not from a strong God, but from a weak God” – a God on the cross (see Aubert 2011:53). Aubert also positions Bonhoeffer as one who formulated these “novel ideas in his *Letters*” and developed them in Tegel (see Aubert 2011:53). These ideas of Bonhoeffer touched a very core Lutheran thinking from which he was moving away in a different direction than held in his early writings.

2.6 Conclusion

The aforesaid is about Bonhoeffer’s Christology in general – I still need to determine whether Bonhoeffer’s views on the Divine changed. If there is a change in his understanding of the ‘two natures’ of Christ, this needs to be understood against the background of the debates of the

¹³ Luther’s idea of *sub contrario* – under the form of opposites, recognises when afflicted people identify themselves in the afflicted Christ; then only they can base their certainty of their salvation to be found in the Christ.

‘two natures’ of Christ, as developed in Chapter Three – preliminary from the early centuries to the 4th century and the Christological debates in the wake of the European enlightenment from the 19th and early 20th century debates in Germany and elsewhere that influenced Bonhoeffer.



Chapter 3 Historical Development of the ‘two natures’ of Christ

3.1 Introduction

The significance of this study needs to be understood against the background of the history of Christological debates, especially on the so-called ‘two natures’ of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the ‘two natures’ emerged mainly from three backgrounds, namely patristic theology, classic Lutheran theology and Lutheran theology in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Germany. To achieve this, I will divide this chapter into seven sections. The first section serves as the introduction presenting the aim of each section and outlining the approach to the development of the doctrine during different periods. The second section gives an overview of the development of Christological debates in the patristic period from the earliest period of Gnosticism until the 3rd-century teaching on modalism. The third section briefly examines the evolution of Christological debates from the fourth through fifth century period of Arianism until the development of the Christological formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ by the Chalcedon Council (451). The fourth section examines the evolution of Christological debates during the medieval and reformation periods, for the most part exploring the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and 16th-century reformers Martin Luther comparatively to John Calvin’s understanding. I will do so in the relevance of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the ‘two natures’ of Christ against the background of this period of the reformation. In the fifth section, I will concentrate briefly on the development of Christological debates from the 19th through the early 20th centuries investigating three specific Christological tensions that characterised this period. In the first place, I’ll give an overview of the Christological tension from ‘below’ and ‘above,’ then, the Christological tension between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith and last the Christological tension between the functional and ontological forms of Christology. In the sixth section, my conclusions are drawn to this end, to unearth Bonhoeffer’s Christology and its development during his formative years. In this section, I will give brief overviews of academic scholarly influences on Bonhoeffer’s life and the theologies of Martin Luther and Karl Barth. The final section will constitute the conclusion to the above sections. Be aware that the sections in this chapter are briefly discussed since there are ample

historical overviews available in current literature that deal with these topics.¹⁴

3.2 Developments of the Christological debates in the patristic period from the earliest period of Gnosticism until the third-century teaching on modalism

Since the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, it becomes impossible for anyone within the orbit of Western civilisation to encounter Jesus first as a human, and only subsequently to learn of his messianic claims and the doctrine of his deity. It is important to note that evolving views on these claims developed continually during the history of the church (see Brown 1984:27). Most heresies in the early centuries began with the questioning of the nature of Christ, specifically about his relationship with God, working itself forward to the doctrine of the incarnation. Brown affirms that “heresy often begins with a conception of the nature of Christ and works forward toward an interpretation of his work” (see Brown; 1984:30). The earliest trace of this the first Christological heresy is found in the context of Gnosticism.

The Gnostic impulse sought to preserve several Christian ideas and terms while abandoning the specific dependence of Christianity on the history of the Jews and, in the New Testament, of Jesus and his disciples. The significance of biblical history was replaced with elaborate gnosis [knowledge] about the origin and development of divine, spiritual beings – the so-called aeons – and ultimately of the material world (see Brown 1984:47).

Gnostic Christology was first propagated by Simon Magus in the second century when he claimed himself to be the saviour, an incarnation of God himself. Discrediting Jesus as the Christ he taught that Jesus’ crucifixion and death took place in appearance only, and he was God in reality, and a human in appearance only – thus giving rise to the first heresy known as ‘Docetism’ (from Greek *dokeo*, ‘to appear’ or ‘seem’). Grillmeier (1964:65) asserts that,

In the face of docetism and Gnosticism the church insisted on a real presence of the incarnate God in the world and thus on an objective history of the acts of God which cannot be allowed to dissolve into merely an existential self-understanding. The church’s concept of the incarnation is the personal, objective unity of God and man in Christ and

¹⁴ In this chapter I draw on a range of standard text books on the renowned Christological debates of the first few centuries of Christianity. See especially the contributions of Beeley (2012), Bettenson (1974), Berkhof (1996), Mackintosh (1913), Seeberg (1977); and Wilken (1965).

is here already demythologized when compared with the Gnostic conception of the decent of a redeemer.

Rightfully Kelly suggests that “docetism was not a simple heresy on its own; it was an attitude which infected a number of heresies, particularly Marcionism and Gnosticism” (see Kelly 1968:141)

Gnosticism presented the early heresy, Docetism, that can be lodged within Christianity. In Docetism, Christ becomes a shared interest. Gnosticism produced Docetism because it considered it intolerable that a purely spiritual being, Christ, could suffer as a human. Hence he must have been human in appearance only. Docetism denies that Jesus was indeed a physical human being (see Brown 1984:52).

In later years Simon Magus’ thought was taken over, merely for a short period, by his student Menander who had similar claims, that is, to be incarnate. Meander also claimed to be the incarnate saviour but not of the highest God. Menander made the Saviour, Christ, less than God. In contrast to Magus, who had claimed to be both, that is, Father and Saviour as one person, for Menander, they were two, both divine, but not equally so (see Brown 1984:54).

In the wake of this Gnostic crisis, Christianity was confronted with its first fully-fledged doctrinal challenge, namely Gnosticism, that took the relatively simple message of the Gospel and rendered it extremely complicated. It has to be noted here that three individuals stand out during this period, i.e., Basilides, Valentinus and Marcion.

The worst of Gnostics to follow was Marcion of Sinope. He was strongly dualistic, despising the Jewish God and renouncing the Old Testament. Marcion, Grillmeier (1964:99) says,

... is characterized by an extreme dualism. In his *‘Antitheses’*, in complete contradiction to the Christian tradition from which he came, he assumed the existence of two gods, one of the Old Testament and another of the New. Jesus Christ is the Son of the God of the New Testament, but is seen by Marcion in an almost modalistic nearness to the Father. Jesus is the good God in person, clothed in the form of a man. He need only lay this aside to become once again pure Godhead.

Brown describes Marcion’s doctrine as follows:

Marcion devised [a] distinctive Christology ... adopt[ing] the idea that there are, in fact, two gods, the imperfect, wrathful war god of the Old Testament and the ‘unknown God’ the spiritual Father who revealed himself in Jesus. [He was dualistic in thought]. Because of his

dualism, which he viewed the material world and physical bodies as the handiwork of the Demiurge, Marcion denied that Christ ever was truly incarnate. Thus he too was a Docetist (see Brown 1984:64).

Also, Kelly (1968:142) purports that,

Marcion's Christology was docetic, at any rate to the extent that he regarded the Lord's body (not, however, His sufferings) as phantasmal, but it contained no trace of Gnostic pluralism. The Redeemer was the Son of the good God of the New Testament, but more than that; Marcion conceived of Him, almost in the fashion of the modalists, as the good God in person, clothed with the outward appearance.

This section brings to close major heresies found in the second century and gives rise to the great apologists Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (ca. 125-ca. 202), and late second and third century Tertullian of Carthage (ca. 160-ca 230). Irenaeus produced two significant works: '*Against Heresies*' and '*The Unmasking and Refutation of Falsely So-Called Gnosis*' as a direct result of a compulsion to deal specifically with the heresy of Gnosticism. Tertullian directed his writings more against the heresy of Montanus, who considered himself the last great prophet and who felt that the church was reverting to Judaism. Not much can be said of Tertullian's Christology, but the following features can be raised about Irenaeus' Christology in his apology against Gnosticism.

[Irenaeus] is the first Christian thinker to attempt to formulate the meaning of the person and work of Christ in a systematic way. He opposed Gnosticism in detail and gave us an excellent early Christology ... Irenaeus fully recognised him [Christ] as a real man and at the same time confessed him to be God ... Irenaeus prudently refrained from trying to explain the deity of Christ and how it related to the deity of the Father ... he was vitally interested in the incarnation and historicity of Christ, but not in the theological analysis subsequent generation would develop to explain how Christ can be God and distinct from the Father (see Brown 1984:81-84).

For Irenaeus, for humanity to be redeemed, Jesus had to possess the attributes of deity; and to buy back humanity, he had to be human. Subsequently, he left Christendom with two crucial declarations:

[First] *Filius dei filius hominis factus*, 'The Son of God [has] become a son of man,' and [Second] *Jesus Christus vere homo, vere Deus*. 'Jesus Christ, true man, true god. [These declarations came to mean that] Jesus Christ is 'one and the same Jesus Christ, not a Jesus and a Christ, and not a merely temporary union between an aeon and a man, but one and the same, who created the world, was born, suffered, and has ascended.' Against the Gnostics Irenaeus affirmed that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God ... and the redemptive work of Christ depend fully on the identity between his humanity and our humanity (see Brown 1984:84).

Contrary to Irenaeus', Tertullian was the first to express emphatically that Jesus Christ possessed 'two natures,' thus laying the foundation for the formulation of the Chalcedon definition in 451. Although Irenaeus and Tertullian held different views, they had a common belief that God involved himself in the world, by creating it and becoming human (incarnate) through Jesus Christ as human.

In discussing both Tertullian's and Irenaeus's views, Kelly (1968:36) contends that,

For both of them Christ Himself was the ultimate source of Christian doctrine, being the truth, the Word by Whom the Father had been revealed; but He had entrusted this revelation of His apostles, and it was through them alone that knowledge of it could be obtained. 'Through none other', wrote Irenaeus, 'than those by whom the gospel reached us have we learned the plan of our salvation'; while for Tertullian what was believed and preached in the churches was absolutely authoritative because it was the selfsame revelation which they had received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, and Christ from God.

In contrast, Grillmeier in discussing Tertullian's Christology within a historical context says that "Tertullian had to defend the church's tradition of the incarnation of Christ on two different fronts: against pagan polytheism and Monarchianism within the Christian church. Besides, he had to fight against the disruptive and divisive tendencies of Marcion and Valentinus" (see Grillmeier 1964:118).

Some Christians interpreted the incarnation to mean that God the Father himself became human and suffered, a view known as *patripassianism* ('Father-suffering-ism'). This view foreshadowed the modern heresy mentioned earlier, known as the 'death of God.' Bishop John Robinson popularised this label in his publication of *Honest to God* (1963). For Robinson (1963:82), a Christian community existed not to promote a new religion but participate in the "powerlessness of God in the world." Christians range themselves with God in his suffering. *Patripassianism* acknowledged that Christ is entirely God, but did not identify the Son as a separate Person, distinct from the Father (Brown 1984:85).

During the second and third centuries, a time of emerging heresies, the concept of a Trinitarian orthodoxy emerged that is attributed to Origen. Origen suggested that he could explain how the Son can genuinely be a Son and yet have no beginning. Brown says Origen did this:

[By proposing] that the Father eternally begets the Son, and that the Son, eternally begotten before all time, is thus effectively co-eternal with the Father. Origen prepared the way for our present understanding: God does not consist of parts, but subsists in Persons. These persons are distinguished from one another by means of relationship (see Brown 1984:89).

Origen, recognised as a great sage of Christology, was able to influence harmony between the Hellenistic Logos-speculation and the cosmic Logos-theology of the early Christian apologetics, on the one hand, and the historical human Jesus of the Gospels on the other side (see Brown 1984:93). Kelly deemed that “Origen’s Trinitarianism was a brilliant reinterpretation of the traditional triadic rule of faith, to which as a churchman he was devoted, in terms of the same middle Platonism” (see Kelly 1968:128).

In essence Kelly (1968:129) states that,

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are, Origen states, ‘three Persons’ (*ὑποστάσεις*). This affirmation that each of the Three is a distinct hypostasis from all eternity, not just (as for Tertullian and Hippolytus) as manifested in the ‘economy’, is one of the chief characteristics of his doctrine, and stems directly from the idea of eternal generation.

In his credo, Origen never emphasised the incarnation of Jesus but instead emphasised the personal nature of Jesus existing as a human – expressing the ‘actual’ humanity and personhood of Jesus. Thus he emphasised the complete understanding of Jesus “who possessed not only human nature but a human hypostasis” (see Brown 1984:94).

Most of the third century marked the heresy of Sabellius, who taught that God is one being and one person but appears in three different forms – also known as modalism. He explained that Jesus and God were not two distinct persons but rather offices of one person.

[He taught] ‘one Person (hypostasis), three names.’ God is *hyiopater*, Son-Father. The different names, Father, Son, and Spirit, merely describe various forms of revelation; the Son revealed the Father as a ray shows the sun. Now the Son has returned to heaven, and God reveals himself as the Holy Spirit. Sabellius’ view saw the existence of the Son as confined to his earthly work.

Kelly (1968:122) says

[about] Sabellius, we are told, [that he] regarded the Godhead as a monad (his name for it was *ὑποπᾶτωρ*) which expressed itself in three operations. He used the analogy of the sun, a single object which radiates both warmth and light; the Father was, as it were, the form or essence, and the Son and the Spirit His modes of self-expression.

It remained for the Arian controversy a century later to produce a clear explanation of how the Son can be distinct from the Father and yet not different from him (see Brown 1984:103). Grillmeier concludes that “the theological character of the second and early third century was, however, in the end, most deeply influenced by the encounters with early Christian Gnosticism. This grew up like a twin brother alongside early Christianity, almost like Esau with Jacob” (see Grillmeier 1964:79).

3.3 Historical Development of Christological debates from the fourth through fifth century period until the development of the Chalcedon Council (451)

This century marked the starting point for the Christological controversy precipitated by Presbyter Arius (318). He came into conflict with Bishop Alexander when he denied Christ’s divinity. Alexander contested Arius’ views and appealed to the Council of Alexandria (321), hoping to have Arius excommunicated.

What follows is a summary by Kelly (1968:227-229) on the teachings of Arius, namely Arianism. Kelly suggests that “the attitude of Arius and his colleagues can be summarized in four propositions which follow logically from the preceding premise.

First, “the Son must be a creature, whom the Father has formed out of nothing by His mere fiat” (see Kelly 1968:227). The Arius, as mentioned earlier, can be understood figuratively. “Secondly, as a creature the Son must have had a beginning” which he says in retort against “the orthodox suggestion that He [Jesus] in a strict sense was eternal, i.e. co-eternal with the Father, [which] seemed to Arius to entail presupposing ‘two self-existent principles, which spelt the destruction of monotheism” (see Kelly 1968:228). Kelly suggests,

Thirdly, [for Arius] the Son can have no communion with, and indeed no direct knowledge of, His Father. Although He is God’s Word and Wisdom, He is distinct from that Word and that Wisdom which belong to God’s very essence; He is a creature pure and simple, and only bears these titles because He participates in the essential Word and Wisdom. In Himself He is, like all other creatures, ‘alien from and utterly dissimilar to the Father’s essence and individual being’. Being finite, therefore, and of a different order of existence, He cannot comprehend the infinite God (Kelly 1968:228-229).

Kelly (1968:229) concludes that,

Lastly [for Arius] the Son must be liable to change and even sin. At a conference one of the Arians, surprised by a sudden question, admitted that He might have fallen as the Devil fell, and this was what they in their heart of hearts believed. Their official teaching,

however, was a tactful modification of this to the effect that, while the Son's nature was in principle peccable, God in His providence foresaw that He would remain virtuous by His own steadfast resolution, and therefore bestowed this grace on Him in advance.

Arius' following grew, leading Constantine to intervene and call the council of Nicaea (325). This first ecumenical Council of Nicaea defined the relationship of the Son to the Father as of the same essence (*homo-ousios*) with the Father. The following is a translation of the Nicene Creed which the council drafted and required all the bishops present to sign:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead; And in the Holy Spirit. But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, Before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is from a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change-these the Catholic Church anathematizes (Nicene Creed 325).¹⁵

The Nicene Creed affirmed the full divinity of Christ, which secured a temporary victory against Arianism. In 381, the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople endorsed the creed of Nicaea by condemning the Arian controversy. Despite this endorsement, Apollinarius taught that the Logos replaced the human spirit in the earthly Jesus –teaching, which was condemned at the Council of Constantinople (381).

The Nestorian Christological controversy marked the beginning of the fifth century. This happened when Nestorius – a representative of the Antiochene School – declared that Mary should not be called the bearer of God (*theotokos*) but the bearer of Christ. Nestorius declared this, affirming that in speaking of the incarnate Lord, one must distinguish between Jesus' humanity and divinity and that some of the things said of him are to be applied to his humanity and others to his divinity. To explain this position, Nestorius declared that in Jesus, there were 'two natures' and 'two persons,' one divine and one human. The human nature and person were born of Mary; the divine was not. His opponents immediately saw the danger of this and were

¹⁵ Last accessed March 2020 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Council_of_Nicaea)

convinced that his doctrine was erroneous.

The leader of the opposition against Nestorius was Cyril of Alexandria. He debated for the coexisting nature (*hypostasis*) of Christ against the disunion of ‘two natures’, considering this a weaker, a moral union (Nestorianism). Kelly (1968:310) describes Cyril of Alexandria as one who “was an Antiochene in Christology, deeply influenced by the ideas of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and it was his maladroit, crudely expressed exposition of the implications of the Antiochene position that set the spark to the controversy”. Tenaciously in opposition to Nestorius teaching was Cyril of Alexandria. Kelly (1968:317) remarks that “The opposition to Nestorius found a brilliant, if far from scrupulous, mouthpiece in Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria. While jealousy of the upstart see of Constantinople caused him to dip his pen in gall, he was also inspired by motives of a purely theological character.”

The theological nature of Cyril’s criticism was directed at “Nestorius’s teaching, epitomized in his attack on *Theotokos*, presupposed a merely external association between the Word and an ordinary man. From this point of view, the incarnation became an illusion, a matter of ‘appearance’ and ‘empty words’” (see Kelly 1968:318)

In essence “it would appear, he was called upon to pronounce on the suitability of *θεοτόκος* (‘God-bearing’) as a title of the Blessed Virgin and ruled that it was of doubtful propriety unless *ἀνθρωποτόκος* (‘man-bearing’) was added to balance it. In any case, he held, *χριστοτόκος* (‘Christ-bearing’) was preferable as begging no questions” (see Kelly 1968:310). Kelly notes (1968:313) that “it should be observed that the Alexandrian school, as represented by Nestorius’s antagonist Cyril, was ready to recognize the distinction of the divinity and the humanity”.

In contrast, Kelly (1968:312) asserts that Nestorius’ “guiding principles are at any rate clear. A thoroughgoing Antiochene, he insisted that the two natures of the incarnate Christ remained unaltered and distinct in the union.” Questionably Nestorius claimed that “God cannot have a mother, he argued, and no creature could have engendered the Godhead; Mary bore a man, the vehicle of divinity but not God. The Godhead cannot have been carried for nine months in a

woman's womb, or have been wrapped in baby-clothes, or have suffered, died and been buried” (see Kelly 1968:311).

In summary, the key to understanding Cyril of Alexandria's problem with Nestorius' teaching was this that,

The Christological problem did not present itself to him as that of explaining the union of two disparate natures. An exponent of the 'Word-flesh' scheme, he thought rather in terms of two phases or stages in the existence of the Logos, one prior to and the other after the incarnation. The Logos, as he liked to say, 'remains what He was'; what happened was that at the incarnation, while continuing to exist eternally in the form of God, He added to that by taking the form of a servant (Kelly 1968:319).

Kelly concludes that,

The clearest, most succinct epitome of Cyril's doctrine is the famous formula which he took over, in the sincere but mistaken belief that it had the authority of the great Athanasius behind it, from certain treatises of Apollinarian provenance, 'one nature, and that incarnate, of the divine Word' ... Such being Cyril's guiding principle, he could admit of no division in the Incarnate (Kelly 1968:319).

At the third Ecumenical Council held in Ephesus (431), which entailed a debate between Nestorius and Cyril, the notion of Mary as the bearer of God (*theotokos*) was officially endorsed. The council adopted the union of two natures of Christ (hypostasis), thereby finalising the dispute between Cyril of Alexander and Nestorius in favour of Cyril.

The fourth Ecumenical Council held at Chalcedon (451) was primarily prompted by the fifth-century heresy of Eutyches (449). Kelly (1968:332) says this of Eutyches's doctrine.

What Eutyches's actual doctrine was has never been easy to determine. At a preliminary examination, before the envoys of the synod, he declared that 'after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ I worship one nature, viz. that of God made flesh and become man'. He vigorously repudiated the suggestion of two natures in the Incarnate as un-Scriptural and contrary to the teaching of the fathers. Yet he expressly allowed that He was born from the Virgin and was at once perfect God and perfect man. He denied ever having said that His flesh came from heaven, but refused to concede that it was consubstantial with us. At his interrogation before the synod he yielded the point that Christ was 'of two natures', but argued that that was only before the union.

Eutyches believed along with other Monophysites that Christ had only one true nature, and Jesus was half-human and half-divine, which was emphasised to protect the unity of Christ's person. The roots of Monophysitism went back to monastic ideas in Egypt and Syria, where self-denial of human faculties was strongly affirmed to gain spiritual power. For Christ to have

a similar human nature was unthinkable. Eutyches' heresy prompted the formulation of the Chalcedon statement of the doctrine of the Person of Christ found in the Chalcedon definition of faith. Although this definition appeared to bring a specific end to the Christological controversy, its implications still had to be worked out for centuries after Chalcedon. During the fifth, sixth, and seventh ecumenical councils (II Constantinople, 553; III Constantinople, 680-81; and II Nicaea, 787), there continued to be controversies over Monophysite tendencies.

Christian orthodoxy still embraces the 'Chalcedonian definition' that maintains that Jesus Christ was (and is) both divine and human and that his 'two natures' did not 'mix' but were joined together in a mysterious, hypostatic union. The Council of Chalcedon 451 developed this final Christological formulation:

We then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial (*homoousion*) with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God (*theotokos*), according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, in 'two natures', without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the distinction of nature's being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature preserved, and concurring in one person (*prosopon*) and one subsistence (*hypostasis*), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us (The Creed of Chalcedon: October 22, 451).

This means that the official affirmation, viz. that Jesus' 'two natures' (divine and human) were not 'mixed' to create some third kind of nature is still widely accepted within the Christian tradition. Although this formulation has never been very satisfactory and prompted much further controversy, it remains a point of reference in ongoing Christological debates to this day. It will be necessary for my discussion of Bonhoeffer and his Christology.

By 680, almost all the possible options regarding Jesus' 'two natures' were played out. All the subsequent major theologians, at least in the Western tradition of Christianity (if not the Coptic and Ethiopian churches), affirmed the Chalcedonian definition and offered an exposition of that to claim their orthodoxy. What follows is a brief description of subsequent medieval and

reformation expositors affirming their belief.¹⁶

3.4 Development of Medieval and Reformation Christologies

The first medieval thinker to formulate a concrete Christology was Thomas Aquinas. In his writings, Bonhoeffer refers to this 13th century period as a period of scholasticism, and he included it in various aspects of his theology and as he developed his Christology in his writings. Thomas Aquinas gave birth to the Thomistic school of thought used primarily in the Catholic Church's theological approach. Bonhoeffer often refers to Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, which will be explored later, to uncover his explanation on the person and nature of Christ. In his *Summa Theologica: Treatise on the Incarnation* (qq [1]-59), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) exhaustively explores the mode of union, the person and nature of the Incarnate Word. In this regard, Aquinas questioned whether the union of the incarnate word took place in person and concludes the affirmative.

I answer that, Person has a different meaning from 'nature.' For nature, as has been said (A[1]), designates the specific essence which is signified by the definition. And if nothing was found to be added to what belongs to the notion of the species, there would be no need to distinguish the nature from the *suppositum* of the nature (which is the individual subsisting in this nature), because every individual subsisting in a nature would be altogether one with its nature. ... Therefore, whatever adheres to a person is united to it in person, whether it belongs to its nature or not. Hence, if the human nature is not united to God the Word in person, it is nowise united to Him; and thus belief in the Incarnation is altogether done away with, and Christian faith wholly overturned. Therefore, inasmuch as the Word has a human nature united to Him, which does not belong to His Divine Nature, it follows that the union took place in the Person of the Word, and not in the nature (Aquinas 1471: A[2]2701f).

Additionally, could one confirm whether, after the incarnation, the person of hypostasis of Christ is composite? Aquinas answers that the Person or hypostasis of Christ may be viewed in two ways:

First as it is in itself, and thus it is altogether simple, even as the Nature of the Word. Secondly, in the aspect of person or hypostasis to which it belongs to subsist in a nature; and thus the Person of Christ subsists in 'two natures'. Hence though there is one subsisting being in Him, yet there are different aspects of subsistence, and hence He is said to be a composite person, inasmuch as one being subsists in two. And thereby the solution to the first is clear (Aquinas 1471: A[2]2705).

¹⁶ Most standard works on Christology or Church History offer an exposition of the involvement and contribution of these major theologians and their Christological debates.

In Bonhoeffer's writings, references to Aquinas's ideas,¹⁷ and particularly his Christology, are spread widely. Bonhoeffer was aware of Aquinas Christology and did not articulate it often but locates Aquinas' views in the period of high scholasticism of the 13th century. In discussing Aquinas' ideas in *Ethics* – that it is only by participation in reality that we also share in good – the question of good becomes the question of participating in God's reality as revealed in Christ. Aquinas' ideas then encapsulate Bonhoeffer's Christology. He introduces Aquinas' phrase, "as they exist, all things are good" by formulating more precisely, "good is the real itself [*das Wirkliche*] ... the real that has its reality only in God" revealed in Christ (see DBWE 6:50). For Bonhoeffer, "all reality that ignores Jesus Christ are abstracts" and all thinking of good "that plays off what ought to be against what is ... or ought to be, is overcome where the good has become reality, namely in Jesus Christ" (see DBWE 6:54). Accordingly, Aquinas' phrase is a jumping board for his Christology, in the following way in *Ethics*: "for it is in Christ's reality that we are called to participate in God's reality, the good that has become reality, Jesus Christ" (see DBWE 6:55). Subsequently, for Bonhoeffer, the reality of God "is the mystery of the revelation of God in the human being Jesus Christ" (see DBWE 6:55). The latter explanation of how God's reality comes about (the good that has become reality, Jesus Christ) is Bonhoeffer's simple formulation of his Christological theology in *Ethics*. Although Aquinas' Christology is not very pronounced in Bonhoeffer's writings, Aquinas' teachings helped him to shape various aspects of his Christology. Regarding Aquinas, Bethge (2000:54) affirms that "no other writer besides Luther was so fully represented in Bonhoeffer's library in later years, or so frequently consulted."

In contrast to Aquinas, the reformation expositor Martin Luther's (1483-1546) thought played out in different roles in theology – some scholars have suggested that Martin Luther's Christology took only a secondary part in his theology and others that Christology was at the centre of Luther's theology. One particular Christological theological expression Luther developed and often cited was 'wondrous exchange' by which, through the union of Christ

¹⁷ One idea amongst many others Aquinas was known for was his treatment of the relation between nature and grace (grace perfects nature) that coincides with Bonhoeffer's idea of reality being split into two parts – the two realm concept that Bonhoeffer develops in *Discipleship*.

with human nature, his righteousness becomes ours, and our sins become his.¹⁸ In the later development of his theology, this Luther construction is not the only one used to explain the nature of Christ. However, a summary of Luther's position on Christology and the 'two natures' of Christ can be found expressed in the *Smalcald Articles*. Luther's *Smalcald Articles* was submitted to the Smalcald League for adoption early in 1537 and was also regarded as his 'last testament'. The first part of the *Smalcald Articles: Treats of the Sublime Articles Concerning the Divine Majesty* outlines Luther's Christology and his position on the 'two natures' of Christ:

- I. That Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three distinct persons in one divine essence and nature, are one God, who has created heaven and earth.
- II. That the Father is begotten of no one; the Son of the Father; the Holy Ghost proceeds from Father and Son.
- III. That not the Father nor the Holy Ghost but the Son became man.
- IV. That the Son became man in this manner, that He was conceived, without the cooperation of man, by the Holy Ghost, and was born of the pure, holy [and always] Virgin Mary. Afterwards He suffered, died, was buried, descended to hell, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of God, will come to judge the quick and the dead, etc., as the Creed of the Apostles, as well as that of St. Athanasius, and the Catechism in common use for children, teach. Concerning these articles there is no contention or dispute, since we on both sides confess them. Therefore, it is not necessary now to treat further of them (Part One: Smalcald Articles 1537).

Dennis Ngien in *Ultimate Reality and Meaning in Luther's Theology of the Cross: No Other God, But the Incarnate Human God* suggests that it becomes apparent in his writings that Luther's Christology is derived from the biblical, rather than an ecclesiastical representation of Jesus Christ. Jesus is portrayed as both divine and human. "In so speaking and acting as God and as man, Christ reveals both the divine and human nature, and yet he is one and the same person" (see Ngien 2004:384). Luther's position on Christology and the 'two natures' of Christ is expressed and understood in Luther's (1540) *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*, in which Luther's illuminates his understanding of the 'two natures' of Jesus in this way, that,

The reason for this disputation is this that I desired you should be supplied and fortified against the future snares of the devil. May you preserve this article in its simplicity, that

¹⁸ For the contribution on Luther's theology and Christology see Werner Elert (1962), Martin Rumscheidt (1999), Walther von Loewenich (1976) and Martin Luther (1540). www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-divinity.txt (Accessed 09 March 2017).

in Christ there is a divine and a human nature, and these ‘two natures’ in one person, so that they are joined together like no other thing, and yet so that the humanity is not divinity, nor the divinity humanity, because that distinction in no way hinders but rather confirms the union! That article of faith shall remain, that Christ is true God and true man, and thus you shall be safe from all heretics (Luther 1540).

Another summary of Luther’s position on Christology is found in his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518).

A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore, he prefers, works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls ‘enemies of the cross of Christ’ (Phil. 3:18), for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said Therefore the friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are dethroned and the ‘old Adam’, who is especially edified by works, is crucified. It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his ‘good works’ unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God’s.¹⁹

To get a proper insight into Luther’s Christology, we must reconstruct various parts of his writings to gather the Christological implications found in his theology. I will do so by examining the rendering of Luther’s theology by Karl Holl and Paul Althaus, respectively.

Holl (1977:76) in discussing Luther’s Christology²⁰ expresses that Luther “went beyond the Catholic conception of the work of Christ at two points. [First], He regarded the death of Christ strictly as punishment borne by him vicariously ... [Second], In Luther’s thinking, the death of Christ is intimately connected with his resurrection”. This idea “death of Christ strictly as punishment borne by him vicariously” is a concept that Bonhoeffer further develops in *Sanctorum Communio*. Holl (1977:77) taught that Luther “revives the Pauline view that death and resurrection constitute an inseparable unity”. Holl explores this idea by saying that Luther “associated with the resurrection (and again Paul is his source) the further thought that Christ as spirit can now be present in the believer” a concept that Bonhoeffer further develops in

¹⁹ Last accessed March 2020 <http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php#21>

²⁰ Holl in discussing Luther’s Christology frames it within the context of the Christian’s confrontation by the *Anfechtungen* (this is a multi-faceted concept related to the Christian in ‘trials’, ‘temptations’, ‘affliction’ and ‘tribulations’). David P. Scaer (1983:16) in ‘The Concept of *Anfechtung* in Luther’s Thought’ concludes that, “The Christian confronted by the *Anfechtungen* is left doubting about whether God or Satan is in control” (Concordia Theological Quarterly, 47.1, pgs. 15-30).

Sanctorum Communio. In discussing the ideas as mentioned earlier, viz., death and resurrection Holl (1977:77) concludes, that,

The starting points of Luther's conception of the person and work of Christ are thus clear and understandable. They sustain a firm relation to the innermost impulses of his piety. It is therefore completely wrong to regard Luther's Christology as merely the consequence of his doctrine of the Lord's Supper; the decisive points of his Christology is laid down before the beginning of the Eucharist controversy.

Holl (1977:78) believed that "In Christology, Luther regarded it as an essential point that the divinity of Christ is revealed in his very humanity. ... To learn the true will of God, one must keep to the humanity of Christ." Holl continues by saying that,

Luther insists that the divine, the will of God, be intuited quite directly in the apparently human acts and sufferings of Christ. ... What matters is the unity [of the two natures]. ... But when Luther sought to express his view in the ancient two-nature terminology, he came close to monophytism.

In discussing Luther's theology Paul Althaus (1966:9) suggest that,

Luther very carefully considered the subject matter of theology. Theology is concerned with the knowledge of God and of man. It is therefore both theology in the narrower senses – the doctrine of God – and anthropology. These two are inseparably joined together. God can be properly known only in terms of his relationship to man; and man can be properly known only in terms of his relationship to God.

On his discussion on the revelation of God Althaus (1966:20) says that,

For Luther, there is a contrast between man's attempt to find and know God on his own and the knowledge and encounter which God gives through His word, and this contrast is of decisive importance. This theme runs through Luther's entire theology, in all phases of its development, and Luther repeatedly discusses it.

Althaus (1966:21) asserts that Luther believed that, "God cannot meet us when he is clothed in his majesty. ... Prior to eternity, we shall not see God face to face as he is in his deity, majesty and glory." However, it is in "His humanity, the place to which God summons us. Christ alone is the sanctuary and the mercy seat of the New Testament. Only here is God now present with men; and it is here that we must speak with him, for he will hear us only here. ... Christ himself is present to us in a very earthly way. Everywhere in the history of revelation, God embodies himself for us. ... And God still embodies himself for us" (see Althaus 1966:22).

Bonhoeffer is often referred to as a modern Lutheran revisionist. In his writings, Bonhoeffer develops themes that can appear to be a polemic against Luther's views. He frequently enters into dialogue with Luther's theology found in the books of Galatians, Romans, and Old

Testament texts. The Old Testament played an essential role in the development of Luther's Christology as embedded in his writings. Although there are hints of Christological conversation with Luther's writings, there are the direct instances of Bonhoeffer engaging with Luther's Christology. This dialogue with Luther stands true throughout most, if not all, of Bonhoeffer's writings. Michael P DeJonge implies that in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writings:

Martin Luther is ubiquitous. Bonhoeffer cites or quotes no theologian more often than Luther – about 870 times, almost always approvingly. This includes direct mentions, citations, and quotations of Luther by Bonhoeffer (or by students' notes recording Bonhoeffer) in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (DeJonge 2016:19).

Bonhoeffer also chooses to engage Luther's themes directly, for example, in *Discipleship*, viz., the important Lutheran theme of the “doctrine of the two kingdoms” [*zwei Reiche*] and the idea of the “obedience shown in the free deeds of following Christ” (see DBWE 4:8). In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer cites several citations from Luther's commentary on the book of Galatians. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer uses Luther's expression “in, with, and under” – a Lutheran expression used by Bonhoeffer regarding the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist – this is the closest he gets to referring to Luther's Christology in *Ethics* (see DBWE 6:401). Bonhoeffer often associated Luther's Christology with a Christology of condescension, the condescension of Jesus as the Son of God, and the Son of Man. Jesus became the person for sinners by first suffering and dying – this Christology of condescension becomes Luther's theology of the cross.

On the whole, in his writings, amidst many other ideas such as Luther's doctrine of the ‘three orders,’ Bonhoeffer refers to Luther's monastic life. He uses Luther's commentary on both Old and New Testament books. At last, the evidence is found in his writings that Bonhoeffer used Luther's version of the Bible.

Another 16th-century reformer worth mentioning at this juncture is John Calvin (1509-1564). I include John Calvin in this study here to compare his understanding of the ‘two natures’ of Christ against the 16th-century reformer and his contemporary, Martin Luther. John Phillips contends that Calvin is first relevant for the understanding and study of Bonhoeffer's Christology and summarised as follows:

The Lutheran interest in the [Christological concept about the interaction of deity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ] and the subsequent counter-arguments of the Calvinists were inspired by the forbidden question ‘How?’ Bonhoeffer felt obliged to defend the Lutheran development, because he saw Calvinist Christology primarily as the explication of a ‘humiliated *logos*’ which concerned itself with the pointless distinction between properties which belonged to Christ’s divine nature and those which characterised his human nature (Phillips 1967:271).

Calvin’s²¹ works elicited numerous responses that can be established in different contexts and documented books²² that may serve as reputable guides to the thought of Calvin. Its chapters furnish the reader with an introduction to and commentary on Calvin’s life and work, written by authors from different sociological contexts. John Hesselink’s article, *Calvin’s Theology*,²³ acknowledges that Calvin is concerned with one thing only, i.e., God revealed in the flesh (see Hesselink 2004:79). For Hesselink, to begin with, Calvin’s theology is, to start with the proposition that Calvin’s theology is found in his understanding of God. One distinctive motif for Calvin is the importance of the incarnate word: “It’s crucial that God’s Word in the flesh, Jesus Christ, does not remain high above us but exists in solidarity with us” (Hesselink 2004:81). Calvin’s emphasis can be clearly deduced from the following:

... that the true manhood of Jesus Christ is the presupposition for our communion with him, but it would be fatal to think of his humanity apart from his divinity ... this has always been the orthodox doctrine of the church ... Calvin insisted that just as God is free in regard to the efficacy of the word, so also God remains sovereign and free in the incarnation (Hesselink 2004:81).

Hesselink signifies that Calvin’s doctrine of the humanity of Christ was Chalcedonian in his Christology, that is, Jesus Christ was true God and an actual human. He affirmed the deity of Christ unequivocally but gave a special place to the humanity of Christ in effecting our salvation. Calvin regarded the whole life of Jesus as redemptive and on his obedience (see Hesselink 2004:86). Hesselink does not spend much time explaining how Calvin understood the incarnation.

However, Bonhoeffer considers Calvin’s view – that the Word becomes flesh to be humiliated

²¹ A prolific work *Contra Mennonem* (Against Menno) – Menno’s twenty articles on the incarnation – gives us insight into Calvin’s theology on the incarnation.

²² Such as *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* edited by Donald K, McKim (2004) and *The Calvin Handbook* edited by Herman J. Selderhuis (2009).

²³ For further reading see Hesselink (2004).

– to be false. Instead, he subscribes to the Lutheran view as the correct one – that the Word which has become flesh then humiliates itself. This means that Jesus chooses himself a particular form or status in which to reveal Himself, as expressed by Phillips:

Humiliation and not incarnation is the Christological problem. Bonhoeffer saw the problem inherent in the Lutheran *genus majesticum* of turning Christ into a ‘divinised man’ [that is, the human nature of Christ participates in the majesty of God without losing human attributes or conferring human attributes on divine natures], but defended the insistent *hoc est corpus meum* [this is my body] of Luther’s doctrine of the sacrament against the Calvinist *extra Calvinisticum* [that is, Christ’s divine nature cannot be enclosed or imprisoned within a human, but remains infinite despite being in union with a finite body] (Phillips 1967:272).

The preliminary objections of Bonhoeffer against the Calvinist position all illustrate that Bonhoeffer did not want to go against the Chalcedon formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ. In essence, he remained Chalcedonian in his approach.

3.5 Christological Debates in the wake of the European Enlightenment (19th – Early 20th Centuries)

The advent of the Enlightenment profoundly influenced Christological reflections in the Western world. It is fair to say the human nature of Christ was widely emphasised while the divine nature of Christ became deeply contested, along with categories such as the very existence of ‘God,’ the type of the supernatural, and notions of transcendence. In the tradition of liberal theology, the divine nature of Christ was often affirmed, but this was subjected to quite radical reinterpretations. It is impossible to give a detailed overview of such Christological debates here. It may suffice to mention only three well-known tensions that characterised Western Christologies in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Such discussions formed the context within which Bonhoeffer’s Christological reflections were situated.

Firstly, there is a tension between *Christology* from below and from above. Christologies from below begin with the human Jesus and then seek to explain his divinity on that basis. This position from below seeks specific historical incidents in the life of Jesus to appropriate that for contemporary praxis, for example, in the context of liberation theology. Christologies from above take the divinity of Jesus as a point of departure and then seek to explain how God can be manifested in human existence, in one person, namely Jesus of Nazareth. This position,

from above, stresses full knowledge of Christ's divinity and informs our entire understanding of his person and work. The tension between Christologies from 'below' and from 'above' raises the question of the appropriate starting point for *Christology*. This debate shaped the intellectual climate in which Bonhoeffer studied theology in Berlin in the 1920s.

Secondly, there is the tension between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. This distinction was first introduced by Martin Kähler, who argued that the historical Jesus was not only irrelevant for the Christian faith but was opposed to it because it sought to replace faith in the biblical Christ. For Kähler, the real Christ is a Christ of faith, detached from the Jesus of history (see Wright 1996). From a biblical standpoint presently (19th Century) Grillmeier suggest that "Martin Kähler stood at the beginning of the new movement", that is, painting a picture of a historical Jesus through means of purely historical methods. However, he admits that "the pendulum has now swung in the opposite direction: whereas the slogan used to be 'the pure Jesus of history', it is now 'the pure Christ of faith'" (see Grillmeier 1964:3). Grillmeier concludes that "this problem of the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith' has been posed, both terminologically and methodologically, in a more exact and fruitful way in recent discussion", and from this we can draw the following conclusion related to the concept of the 'historical Jesus' (see Grillmeier 1964:5). Grillmeier suggests that,

... the concept of 'the historical Jesus' has itself been clarified, after its somewhat vague usage proved to have unfortunate consequences for New Testament theology. The following definition has recently been suggested and has found acceptance: the phrase 'historical Jesus' refers to 'Jesus, in so far as he can be made the object of critical historical research' (Grillmeier 1964:5).

Kähler responded to the so-called first quest for the historical Jesus since the early 18th century in which the Bible was interpreted mainly as a historical document. This quest was pioneered by French and German theologians, including Herman Reimarus, Gotthold Lessing, David Strauss, Ernest Renan, William Wrede, and significantly, Albert Schweitzer. In 1906 Schweitzer wrote *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (translated into English in 1910). His investigation of history uncovered Jesus as an apocalyptic Jew, someone steeped in Old Testament prophecy and eschatological hope, concluding that Jesus died a disillusioned figure. He construed that Jesus was mistaken about his future and that he will forever remain a mystery

and stranger to humanity. Schweitzer conjectured that the Chalcedonian doctrine of the ‘two natures’ of Christ stood in the way of the emergence of the historical Jesus by suggesting:

When at Chalcedon the West overcame the East, its doctrine of the ‘two natures’ dissolved the unity of the Person, and thereby cut off the possibility of a return to the historical Jesus. The self-contradiction was elevated into a law. But the Manhood was so far admitted as to preserve, in appearance, the rights of history. Thus by deception the formula kept the Life prisoner and prevented the leading spirit of the Reformation from grasping the idea of a return to the historical Jesus. This dogma had first to be shattered before men could once more go out in quest of the historical Jesus, before they could even grasp the thought of His existence (Schweitzer 1910:3).

Thirdly, there is tension between functional and ontological forms of Christology. Functional forms of Christology (typically from below) define Jesus in terms of his function by emphasising his ministry, seeking to explain the significance of that ministry for contemporary contexts. Jesus, the miracle worker, fits into a Christology predominantly found in the gospels. Its advocates can trace their roots back to Friedrich Schleiermacher. In his *Quest for a Historical Jesus* Schweitzer suggests that Schleiermacher’s *Life of Jesus* (1835) “introduces us to quite a different order of transitional ideas ... its values lie in the sphere of dogmatics, not of history” (see Schweitzer 1910:62). Schleiermacher is not in search of the historical Jesus, but of the Jesus of his theology – a functional form of Christology. Schweitzer suggests that Schleiermacher saw some limitations in just searching for a historical Jesus:

The limitation of the historical Jesus both in an upward and downward direction are those only which apply equally to the Jesus of Dogma. The uniqueness of His Divine self-consciousness is not to be tampered with. It is equally necessary to avoid Ebionism which does away with the Divine in Him, and Docetism which destroys His humanity. Schleiermacher loves to make his hearers shudder by pointing out to them that the least false step entails precipitation into one or other of these abysses; or at least would entail it for anyone who was not under the guidance of his infallible dialectic (Schweitzer 1910:62-63).

In contrast to Schleiermacher’s views on Jesus, philosopher Martin Heidegger²⁴ suggested an ontological form in doing theology. In essence, Heidegger emphasised the being of Jesus by concentrating on his eternal nature and relationship with the Father. I will notice in the chapter on *Act and Being* that Heidegger’s thoughts on fundamental ontology later shaped Bonhoeffer’s position for his theological purposes. This section also concludes the reviews on

²⁴ Otto Poggeler, (1987) is recommended as further reading for an appreciation of Heidegger’s thinking.

the development of the Christological debates from the patristic period until the early 20th century period set forth to achieve in this study thus far. What follows are brief explanations of scholarly influences that initiated the shaping and development of Bonhoeffer's theology and Christology, viz., the 'two natures' of Christ.

3.6 Development of Bonhoeffer's Christology on the 'two natures' of Christ during his formative years.

Although it can be argued that Bonhoeffer's Christology was heavily influenced by Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Karl Barth, and others, I think his theology and Christology were grounded in his understanding of his Lutheran tradition. These arose from his earlier involvement in longstanding Christological debates with regards to the 'two natures' as discussed in the previous section. Quite early in Bonhoeffer's writings, one can detect the centrality of his Chalcedonian Christological orientation geared toward preserving the identity of the 'two natures' of Christ. Bonhoeffer validates his understanding of his Lutheran tradition in both his theology and Christology. By doing so, Bonhoeffer sets the foundation for his later writings both before and after his *Christology*. It is also from this point onward that all the different forms of Christ presented by Bonhoeffer in his corpus – as both human and divine – adhere strictly to the thesis of Jesus' 'two natures.'

Within the framework of the above conclusions, I would like to add that between reading Schleiermacher's liberal Protestant theology, studying epistemology, history of religion, church history, and Dogmatics, one could only assume that Bonhoeffer had a wide array of subject material to work from to develop his theology. However, he was influenced somewhat by his university professors; he still moulded his theology as early as in *Act and Being*. In that publication, Bonhoeffer dealt with the Lutheran theologies presented by Karl Holl and the dialectical theologies presented by Karl Barth to bring together a theory on how to present the 'revelation' of God apart from Karl Barth's theology. By doing so, Bonhoeffer maintained his Lutheran traditions; therefore, he was always ready to present the concreteness of revelation outlined in Lutheran traditional theology. Bonhoeffer presents the 'haveable' God who entered into human history through Jesus – thus stressing both the divine and human natures of God

existing through Christ in his church, the new community.

Although the above is plausible, the possibility cannot be ruled out that his university professors further coloured Bonhoeffer's Christology and different aspects of his Christology. The development of his Christology cannot be understood apart from the liberal theologies to which he was exposed, especially during his studies at Tübingen and Berlin. Given this assumption, I would like to focus primarily on these periods and examine how his professors and prescribed literature might have influenced his Christology. Bonhoeffer's first influence during the formation of his theology and Christology at the age of nineteen was by Professors Adolf Schlatter and Karl Heim at Tübingen University.

Adolf Schlatter, a teacher of New Testament theology and Schlatter's Biblicism, informed Bonhoeffer's Christological view on Scripture. He embraced Schlatter's perspective on the authority of Scripture, especially when it came to matters on faith and church polity that Schlatter believed was all accountable to the jurisdiction of the Scripture. Rumscheidt (1991:52) avers that the influence of the Scripture appears later "in Bonhoeffer's life ... at the heart of the faith that results from having been captivated and convinced by the word of Jesus". Schlatter provided Bonhoeffer the foundation to appropriate the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. The importance of Scripture and the development of his Christology become particularly prominent in Bonhoeffer's spiritual books *Discipleship*, *Life Together*, and his further interest in studying the Old Testament *Psalms* and the interpretation of *Genesis*.

Besides, Bonhoeffer was also influenced by Karl Heim's personalist-existentialist theology that emphasised concreteness, centrality, and temporality. These concepts Bonhoeffer later developed in the 'I-Thou' relationship found in his later writings. Karl Heim, also a teacher of systematic theology whose field of interest was the certainty of faith, caught Bonhoeffer's attention in several ways. Rumscheidt (1991:53) points out that Heim "made it his goal to combine the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Lord of all reality and the necessity to confront modern thinking with the experience of God's grace." Bonhoeffer later in his writings, develops this Christology, predominantly in his *Ethics*. In essence, he stresses that the reality of God and the world finds its foundation and is established in Jesus Christ, the Lord of all

reality. In the same manner, in an essay written by Bonhoeffer, he challenges Karl Heim's concept of God's transcendence in Heim's book *Glaube und Denken* (1932). This idea of the divine existence runs throughout Bonhoeffer's theology, that is, that the concrete revelation of God is found in Jesus Christ, expressed in the church. This idea – Christ existing as a church community – becomes the core of Bonhoeffer's Christology. In response to a letter (dated Dec. 25, 1932) from Helmut Rößler about this, Bonhoeffer writes:

I know I agree with you in not regulating the church to the level of prophecy. (I have just published an article about it in *Christentum und Wissenschaft*, in distinct opposition to Heim's book [*Glaube und Denken*]. What Heim says on this is totally absurd, patently impossible). The church is more than prophecy (not less!), for it is *Christus praesens* (Christ who is present), in the flesh, to be sure, in the form of a human organisation [the church community], but still, *Christus praesens* (DBWE 12:83).

Bonhoeffer left Tübingen University and registered at the University of Berlin in June 1924. It is here that Bonhoeffer became attached to Adolf Harnack, particularly Harnack's views on the German liberal tradition and his theologies in general. Bonhoeffer's appreciation for liberal theology influenced his work in the 1940s with questions about 'religionless Christianity' and questions about God 'in the secular.' Later in his theology, Bonhoeffer refers to Harnack's *Outlines of the History of Dogma* in his *Christology* (DBWE 12:335) with regards to the doctrine of enhypostasia²⁵ and other heresies. Scharffenorth (2009:489), in the afterword to *DBWE* volume 12, affirms that Bonhoeffer was intent on taking Harnack's accomplishments in the field of dogmatic history seriously. Bonhoeffer agreed with his teacher that the Chalcedonian formula used object-related categories, and to that extent, Bonhoeffer's Christology stayed close to that of his teacher Harnack – even to the point of criticising the doctrine of enhypostasia.

Another prominent figure at Berlin University was Bonhoeffer's supervisor for his doctoral dissertation, Reinhold Seeberg; He was attracted to Seeberg's Christology in various ways. Phillips explains Seeberg's Christology as follows: First, "the basis of theology is ... for Seeberg the immediate reality of the new life in Christ in the consciousness" (see Phillips 1967:43). Second, Seeberg "maintained a historical understanding of the Trinity, whereby the

²⁵ Jesus had a human hypostasis of his own and existed hypostatically in the divine hypostasis.

church exists in the time of the Holy Spirit, in the process of being realised” ... “the relationship between Christ and God thus being determined at the same time” (see Phillips 1967:43). Third, for Seeberg, this is how Christ’s nature and God-knowledge are known by “the God who is revealed to us in Christ is holy, almighty love-will ... this God-willed created the man Jesus for its organ and what he felt, willed, thought, said, and did was worked in Him by the personal God-will that dwelt in Him” (see Phillips 1967:43). In Seeberg’s doctrine on the Trinity, he further developed the theology of the incarnation as being the third person of the Trinity. Although Bonhoeffer only had a brief encounter with Seeberg and differed from him in many ways, Bonhoeffer still was attracted to Seeberg’s theology for years after the completion of his dissertation. Bonhoeffer acquired Seeberg’s textbook on the history of doctrines *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, (1985-1898) that became a source for Bonhoeffer’s knowledge on Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Melanchthon, and Luther (see Bethge 2000:70). Seeberg’s presentation of Luther’s idealism, theology, and philosophy certainly made Bonhoeffer question and formulate a different theology. In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer followed Seeberg’s idea of ‘vicarious representation’ as the substance and sum of Christology (see DBWE 1:155). Although Seeberg’s influence can be considered brief, he notably influenced Bonhoeffer’s theology and Christology.

Bonhoeffer was also strongly attracted to Karl Holl, a church historian at the University of Berlin, and even a foremost interpreter of Luther’s theology. Holl relied on Luther’s writings to a great extent as extant sources for Reformation theology. Equally crucial to Holl was Luther’s teaching on justification – that humans are at the same time justified and sinners – a doctrine that Bonhoeffer rejected. Despite this, the influence of Holl’s theology and Christology remained with Bonhoeffer throughout his life work, and he also applied it, especially in his later writings. Amidst Bonhoeffer’s theological development, Martin Luther’s thought, as shared by Holl, also influenced Bonhoeffer’s theology deeply, specifically on the concept of religious subjectivity. Later while being in Berlin, Bonhoeffer reasoned that Luther’s first formulation could not be a subjective religion; the ethical reality should not be founded in subjectivity, but the objective Word of God in Christ. Although Bonhoeffer often

questioned Holl's theology on Luther, he was deeply fascinated by it, and he quotes and applies Holl, most of all his teachers.

On the whole, Bonhoeffer's interest in Luther gradually waned (although not entirely) when he discovered and became interested in the theology of Karl Barth.²⁶

This discovery happened before student years and increased as a student in Tübingen in 1927, and developed even further after his enrollment at Berlin. Bonhoeffer came under Barth's spell, and soon after Bonhoeffer returned from New York in 1932, they developed a personal relationship by corresponding regularly. Karl Barth (1886-1968), as a prominent theologian, had a significant impact on Bonhoeffer's theology and Christology. However, it was mainly under Barth's influence that Bonhoeffer found the interpretation of Luther by his Berlin professor, Karl Holl, the foremost Luther scholar of his day, inadequate.

Bonhoeffer read Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* and his *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Bonhoeffer and Barth had in common that they both rejected the 19th-century liberal theology. He learned from Barth the value of having a high view of Scripture, a balanced theological interpretation, and an objective historical-critical approach. Many other Barthian themes, such as 'transcendence' and 'revelation,' would be incorporated into Bonhoeffer's later writings, specifically ideas on 'revelation.'

Discussing Barth's theme of 'revelation,' Woelfel particularly suggests that, for the most part, Bonhoeffer agreed with Barth's ideas on the nature and method of theology as grounded solely upon the concrete actuality of God revealed in Christ (see Woelfel 1970:102). Bonhoeffer repeatedly affirmed that God is revealed in Christ and only in Christ. De Jonge also suggests that the Barthian question remained with Bonhoeffer – "How should revelation be understood, given the background of the general problem of transcendence" (see De Jonge 2012:8). Barth's solution to the problem of transcendence was "the rigorous maintenance of the distinction between God and humanity," thus, for Barth, God's revelation became "only a momentary act"

²⁶ For further reading on Karl Barth's influence on Bonhoeffer's theology see Martin Rumscheidt (1999). For reference guides to Karl Barth's theology see Geoffrey W. Bromiley (1979) and Karl Barth (1972).

(see De Jonge 2012:9). This act became true even during the incarnation and revelation: “God remained God and humanity remained humanity” (see DeJonge 2012:9). Bonhoeffer did not agree with Barth’s views on ‘revelation’ and ‘transcendence’; by contrast, Bonhoeffer described God as entering through the person of Christ – this reflected God’s humanity – which is how God revealed himself and entered into history. “Bonhoeffer’s understanding of revelation and incarnation in terms of a person emphasised the already accomplished reconciliation of God and humanity” (see De Jonge 2012:9). In his analysis of Barth’s theology concerning Bonhoeffer, Martin Rumscheidt affirms that Bonhoeffer’s critique of Barth was always that he made “God’s revelation his point of departure” rather than addressing it to the community – the church as God’s revelation (see Rumscheidt 1999:64). Bonhoeffer believed “that if revelation is to be spoken of Christologically, then the aspect of Christ existing as community needs to be the point of departure, the concreteness of that factor” – the divine nature revealed (see Rumscheidt 1999:64). For Bonhoeffer, the church in Barth’s theology is something entirely different than that of making it the community – the church as God’s revelation. Eberhard Bethge (1961:35) stressed that for Bonhoeffer, “there is no God other than the incarnate One known to us and meeting us in ‘Christ existing as the community of men, the church.’” Ultimately for Bonhoeffer’s revelation’ referred to the divine nature revealed in the church community. Bonhoeffer’s views on ‘revelation’ and ‘transcendence’ stayed with Barth. Almost sixteen years after Bonhoeffer’s death, Barth repudiated his previous understanding of the incarnation, revelation, and transcendence in a lecture, *The Humanity of God* (1961) by averring:

In Jesus Christ, there is no isolation of man from God or of God from man. Rather, in Him, we encounter the history, the dialogue, in which God and man meet together and are together, the reality of the covenant mutually contracted, preserved, and fulfilled by them. Jesus Christ is in His one Person, as true God, man's loyal partner, and as true man, God's. He is the Lord humbled for communion with man and likewise the Servant exalted to communion with God. He is the Word spoken from the loftiest, most luminous transcendence and likewise the Word heard in the deepest, darkest immanence (Barth 1961:46). Where did we really go astray? ... I believe it consisted in the fact that we were wrong exactly where we were right, that at first we did not know how to carry through with sufficient care and thoroughness the new knowledge of the deity of God which was so exciting both to us and to others. Moreover, Master Calvin in particular has given us more than wise guidance in this matter. The allegation that we were teaching that God is everything and man nothing was bad (Barth 1961:44).

Godsey (2015:24) denotes that Barth and Bonhoeffer's "theological differences come at the point where they are most deeply bound together. Both accepted the general guidelines of the Chalcedon that in Jesus Christ there is united both true divinity and true humanity".

To bring to close the discussion on Barth's influence on Bonhoeffer's theology and the similarities found in their theology, I would like to discuss Barth's theology (*extra Calvinisticum*) to Bonhoeffer's Lutheran theology on the 'two natures' of Christ particularly on the incarnation regarding the *logos*. Regarding this Pangritz as mentioned earlier (2018:15) remarks that Bonhoeffer's

Lutheran reservation against the *extra Calvinisticum* is not applicable to the period of Bonhoeffer's very first encounter with Barth's theology. On the contrary in the seminars of 1925 and 1926 Bonhoeffer shows himself very much a 'Barthian,' much to the displeasure of his teacher Reinhold Seeberg.

Regarding the *Logos* (God becoming human through Christ), Barth's theology varies from Bonhoeffer distinctively. Barth says: "The unity of God and man in Christ is then, the act of the *Logos* in assuming human being" and Jesus becoming human "is an act of God in the person of the Word" (see Barth [1938] 2004:162). It must be noted that Barth says:

But this then created being has an independent existence in relation to God. It is real only in virtue of creation and preservation, through God, and to that extent only in unity with God. But it is real in this unity, not as though it were God itself, but in such a way that through God it possesses an existence of its own different from the existence of God" (Barth [1938] 2004:162).

Barth says that Christ's "reality, existence and being is wholly and absolutely that of God Himself, the God who acts in His Word. His manhood [Jesus' humanity] is only the predicate of His Godhead, or better and more concretely, it is only the predicate, assumed in inconceivable condescension, of the Word acting upon us, the Word who is the Lord" (see Barth [1938] 2004:162).

Regarding the 'incarnation' Barth says the following:

'*Ἐγένετο*, the event of the incarnation of the Word, of the *unio hypostatica*, has to be understood as a *completed* event, but also as a completed *event*" thereby emphasising that the incarnation should be understood as completed and an event individually (Barth [1938] 2004:165).

Barth further stresses that,

What the New Testament tells us of the reality of Jesus Christ is undoubtedly meant to be heard as the news of an accomplished fact, namely, that in the fullness of time it is became true—and it was this that made this time fulfilled to me—that once and for all God became Man and so His Word reached the ears of us men, and so we men were reconciled to God. The reality of Jesus Christ is an objective fact. It is this that gives Christology, so to speak, its ontological reference (Barth [1938] 2004:165).

The following extract gives us the sense that Barth argues for a definite distinction between the ‘human being Christ’ and ‘God Himself’. Barth concludes that,

... the miracle of the incarnation, of the *unio hypostatica*, is seen from this angle when we realise that the Word of God descended from the freedom, majesty and glory of His divinity, that without becoming unlike Himself He assumed His likeness to us, and that now He is to be sought and found of us here, namely, in His human being. There is no other form or manifestation in heaven or on earth save the one child in the stable, the one Man on the cross...Every question concerning the Word which is directed away from Jesus of Nazareth, the human being of Christ, is necessarily and wholly directed away from Himself, the Word, and therefore from God Himself, because the Word, and therefore God Himself, does not exist for us apart from the human being of Christ” (see Barth [1938] 2004:165).

Barth as mentioned earlier asserts there is a description of the Christological position of Luther, which he later says “resulted [in] a protest of Reformed theology in the 16th and 17th centuries against the crowning assertion of Luther and the Lutherans about the existence of the Word solely in the human existence of Christ. The ‘solely’ was contested, and it was asserted in reply that since the Word is flesh, He also is and continues to be what He is in Himself, He also exists outwith (extra) the flesh” (see Barth [1938] 2004:168).

In a sense, Barth infers to understand those as mentioned earlier,

... we must keep constantly in mind that the reformed theologians maintained this not as a theological innovation, but in continuation of all earlier Christology. The description *Extra Calvinisticum* which was given to their doctrine by the Lutherans was apt only to the extent that it actually was Calvinists who reverted to this tradition to meet the innovation introduced by Luther and the Lutherans. Thus it is not only substantially erroneous, but also historically impossible, to try to prove from this *Extra* the catch phrase that Reformed theology thought ‘generally of the divine and the creaturely-human in separation’. (see Barth [1938] 2004:168f).

Barth asserts that with the Lutherans it must be understood that,

...they merely wished to maintain the *extra* too, beyond the *intra*, i.e., on the one hand the divinity of the God-man, on the other hand His humanity as such. They did want the reality of the *logos asarkos* [Word without flesh] abolished or suppressed in the reality of the *logos ensarkos* [Word enfleshed]. On the contrary, they wished the *logos asarkos* to be regarded equally seriously as the *terminus a quo* [earliest starting point], as the

logos ensarkos was regarded as the *terminus ad quem* [point at which it ends] of the incarnation” (see Barth [1938] 2004:169).

Needless to say a year later in *Church Dogmatics, Barth, Karl IV/57-59* writes on the ‘issue of God’ as being present with us by averring that “our starting-point is that this ‘God with us’ at the heart of the Christian message is the description of an act of God, or better, of God Himself in this act of His” ([1953] 2010:4), which he later says “the name of Jesus Christ covers the whole power of the Christian message because it indicates the whole of its content, because at its heart, which is normative for the whole, it is a message about Him, and therefore a message about the event of that ‘God with us’” (see Barth [1953] 2010:15).

In actuality, Barth emphatically declares that the Christian message pledges “He, Jesus Christ, is Emmanuel, ‘God with us,’ How else can He be proclaimed except as the One who proclaims Himself” ([1953] 2010:15) and continues saying that the Christian message,

It is that message of redemption, and therefore a message of the last and greatest and unsurpassable thing which man can experience from God and has in fact experienced, of the gift of eternal life which has been made to him, because and in so far it is the message of Jesus Christ – that He is the One who, Himself, God, is also man, that He therefore was and is the God who gives salvation and the man to whom it is given and who allows it to be given by Him ([1953] 2010:16).

Those, as mentioned earlier, clearly indicates Barth acknowledgment of both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus, as he expands his ideas on ‘God with us’. As a way of final delimitation, Barth affirms that the Christian message about ‘God with us’ is about Christ, and

the Christian message is service, and the one whom it serves is at all points Jesus Christ Himself. What it says at its heart as the doctrine of atonement is that He himself is and lives and rules and acts, very God and very man, and that He is peace and salvation (see [1953] 2010:17f).

In expanding on God’s work as reconciler and as the One who entered into a covenant relationship with humans, Barth stresses that this relationship is bound up in the freedom of God and not human. The idea above, on atonement/reconciliation Barth frames in his discussion in his *Church Dogmatics, IV/1*. In his study, Barth addresses the subject matter on the ‘doctrine of reconciliation’ to the concept ‘*deus pro nobis*’. ‘*Deus pro nobis*’ was a teaching and idea that became key to Bonhoeffer in developing thoughts on the work and person of Christ, namely, Jesus’s divinity and humanity. Barth says: “Even the fact that God wills to be our God and to act and speak with us as such is free grace on Gods side and something entirely

underserved on ours” (see Barth see [1953] 2010:36). Barth concludes by saying that atonement achieved by Jesus Christ is, in fact, God’s

... great act of God’s faithfulness to Himself and therefore to us – His faithfulness in the execution of the plan [executed in Jesus Christ] and purpose which He had from the very first as the Creator of all things and the Lord of all events, and which He wills to accomplish in all circumstances (Barth see [1953] 2010:44).

Barth concludes that “in Jesus Christ, we are not merely dealing with one of the many beings in the sphere of the created world and the world of men” (see Barth [1953] 2010:44), but on the contrary, we are dealing with God,

... as very God and very man He is the concrete reality and actuality of the divine command and the divine promise, the content of the will of God which exists prior to its fulfilment, the basis of the whole project and actualisation of creation and the whole process of divine providence from which all created being and becoming derives (Barth [1953] 2010:44).

The discussion as mentioned above illustrates Barth’s development of his Christology (particularly in his *Church Dogmatics, IV/1*, which Bonhoeffer himself did not have the opportunity to read, and shows how close Barth’s Christology was, in the end, to that of Bonhoeffer’s. Needless to say, after Bonhoeffer’s death, his writings became very influential in Barth’s theology and Christology.

3.7 Concluding Remarks

Judging from the overview, on the debate on the ‘two natures’ of Christ, it becomes clear that there is a tendency in some contexts to downplay the significance of classic discussions on the person of Christ. At the same time, the need to reaffirm Nicene and Chalcedonian Christology is recognised in other contexts. There is a wide diversity of conflicting positions, each drawing on the biblical witness. There is considerable discontent over words such as ‘essence,’ ‘substance,’ and ‘nature.’ Thus I am still left with the fundamental Christological question: How are divinity and humanity to be understood and be joined in Jesus Christ? Some of these debates shaped Bonhoeffer’s Christology. I also noted that the influences of Bonhoeffer’s teachers and schooling caused him to evaluate his own opinions, developed his later theology, if as yet in no systematic theology and not according to any overall plan. To frame his position on Christology, more specifically, the evolving views on the so-called ‘two natures’ of Christ,

it may be helpful at this stage to offer expositions of his principal writings. An essential part of the following Chapters Four through Nine will entail a close reading, full description and critical analyses of Bonhoeffer's views on the 'two natures' of Christ and the engagement of scholars with his understanding of the texts.



Chapter 4 Sanctorum Communio

4.1. Introduction

Bonhoeffer completed and presented his doctoral thesis on the theme of church-community – the communion of the saints – in 1927; it was published in German in 1930 and English in 1963 and remained one of his most significant theological works. Godsey (2015:21) avers

Already in this work [Sanctorum Communio] is to be seen the influence of the developing ‘theology of the Word of God,’ the chief proponent of which the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, with whom Bonhoeffer never studied as a student, but whose theological perspectives played an important role in the development of this young German’s own theology.

This theological work *Sanctorum Communio* presents the combination of traditional ecclesiology with Christology and metaphysics, particularly with the church as a community as the point of departure and the church as a participant in Christ as the stimulus for reflection on the human condition. These ideas, the ‘church as a community’ and ‘participation in Christ’ Bonhoeffer further use to expand his thoughts on the sociological aspect of the church and Christ. Floyd 1999:74 suggests “here [in *Sanctorum Communio*] we first encounter a leitmotif of Bonhoeffer’s theology as a whole ‘the sociality of Christ and humanity’” as seen in the church. This meant that human beings in the church and Jesus, the divine-human person should be understood “essentially as human social beings intelligible only in the matrix of their relationships, their ‘sociality’” (see Floyd 1999:74). Conclusively, Floyd (1999:74f) suggests that,

Sanctorum Communio remains a profoundly theological work. For the sociality of the church is defined by what Bonhoeffer calls the ‘vicarious representative action’²⁷ of the incarnate and crucified Christ.

Concurrently, in *Sanctorum Communio* the Christ relates to the church is defined as ‘Christ existing as church community’; it becomes an expression that is an essential aspect of Bonhoeffer’s Christology in this profound theological work.

Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Sanctorum Communio* is often assumed as only focusing on sociological aspects of the community, particularly as ‘Christ existing as a church community.’

²⁷ (DBWE 1:121) By anthropological analogy [‘vicarious representative action’] *Stellvertretung* involves acting responsibly on behalf of others and on behalf of communities to which one belongs. This is an idea that Bonhoeffer develops throughout his later writings.

This is not always entirely true. Therefore, one cannot ignore other issues of Bonhoeffer's Christology that he develops in *Sanctorum Communio*. In this chapter, it will become apparent that different Christological nuances can be identified and are scattered in shards throughout the book, each comprising different arguments; that often is almost impossible to put these pieces together in a coherent Christological manner. Bethge agrees that *Sanctorum Communio* was a "unique and unparalleled enterprise" (see Bethge 1967:63). Bonhoeffer had to "take into account conflicting aspects," that is, both the revelatory and sociological aspects of the church, which produced the critical phrase in *Sanctorum Communio*: "Christ existing as a community" (see Bethge 1967:63-75).

For the above reasons, Chapter Four will be structured in the following way: the first section will explore the background to the argument of *Sanctorum Communio*. The second section will explain Bonhoeffer's Christology in general, as found in the *Sanctorum Communio*. The third section will describe, analyse and assess Bonhoeffer's notion about the 'two natures' of Christ as reflected in *Sanctorum Communio* to uncover what Bonhoeffer infers or says indirectly about the 'two natures' of Christ.

4.2 Background to the argument of *Sanctorum Communio*²⁸

Bonhoeffer's *Sanctorum Communio* is set against a diverse background of theological upheavals, social philosophy, and sociology. Although it was meant to be a sociological and Ecclesial-Christocentric treatise, Bonhoeffer weaves myriads of positions together to develop his Christocentric ecclesiology – mainly the relationships of humans as they relate to the sanctorum communio. All of these themes I examine in *Sanctorum Communio* to unearth my final intent: What is Bonhoeffer saying about the 'two natures' of Christ in *Sanctorum Communio*? I will develop this idea in a later section. A good starting point to establish the background to the argument is to piece together the overarching Christian concepts found in

²⁸ The background to *Sanctorum Communio* was not just the historical/social context in which Bonhoeffer was doing his research, but his dissatisfaction with the what had become of the life of the Evangelical church in Prussia. It had either succumbed to a liberal individualism epitomized in Harnack's teaching and had lost its character as a community in which Christ was truly present, or it had become confessionalistic. Either way, the church was not the living "body of Christ" it was meant to be.

Sanctorum Communio essential in understanding the construct of the Christian community.

The four fundamental Christian concepts viz. ‘person,’ ‘primal state,’ ‘sin’ and ‘revelation’ identified in *Sanctorum Communio* (discussed in this section) are pertinent to understanding the construct of the Christian community. Bonhoeffer coherently rebuilds these concepts establishing its interrelationship to the idea of the church as the *sanctorum communio* (DBWE 1:22). These concepts will not be discussed in a particular order but more so discussed in its relationship to each other and its relationship to the church community. Undoubtedly, these concepts cannot be properly understood without concurrently taking into account Bonhoeffer’s underlying obsession with the teachings of Seeberg and Hegel to these concepts (see Bethge 2000:69-72, 220-221). Indeed, *Sanctorum Communio* can be understood as a polemic set out by Bonhoeffer to correct Seeberg’s and Hegel’s teachings, particularly their approach to the *sanctorum communio* as a ‘sociology of religion’ and not seeing it as the foundation of Christian theology. Categorically, I will argue although four overarching concepts can be identified, the overall theme in *Sanctorum Communio* is the ‘conception of the church’ as always the ‘revelation of God’ through Christ and that Christ exists in the church community, the church, empirically. In the end, the ‘revelation of God’ through Christ (viz. the divine nature) passes on into human nature (Jesus) as Christ existing in the church community.

This attempt to discover the interrelationships between every single concept and identifying an overall theme and its relationship to the church community will not so much be an attempt to find the significance of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ within a particular social context. Conversely, it will be an attempt to discover how Bonhoeffer understands the person of Christ, on the so-called ‘two natures’ of Christ and how it should be inferred. I will bear in mind how this understanding of the person of Christ existing as church interrelates with the concept of the *sanctorum communio*.

Before discussing the four fundamental Christian concepts, I mention in brief one preliminary argument presented by a prominent Bonhoeffer scholar who suggested that only one prevalent theme exists in *Sanctorum Communio*. In his investigation of this one theme, Phillips in *Form of Christ on the World* asserts that the one prevalent idea found in the book, is this, that of

“Christ exist[ing] as the church” (see Phillips 1967:48). He contends that Bonhoeffer attempted to construct a Christo-ecclesiology in *Sanctorum Communio* which would “understand the reality of the church of Christ which is given in the revelation of Christ” as Christ existing as the church; while at the same time unfolding this revelation “from the standpoint of social philosophy and sociology” (see Phillips 1967:48). Conversely, in this section, I maintain that Bonhoeffer emphasise more than one concept which he clarifies the following way, viz., that,

[The] more he investigates the significance of the social category for theology in the sanctorum communio the more the social intention of these four basic Christian concepts, the ‘person’, ‘primal state’, ‘sin’ and ‘revelation’ emerges (DBWE 1:21).

These Christian concepts all become essential regarding sociality and the unpacking²⁹ of Bonhoeffer’s theology in *Sanctorum Communio*, as aforementioned. I propose that this becomes the overarching concept in *Sanctorum Communio*, of which the most prominent Christian concept Bonhoeffer emphasise is the concept of ‘revelation’ – more appropriately his theology of ‘revelation.’ Therefore, I maintain Bonhoeffer’s theology of ‘revelation’³⁰ plays a more prominent role in his dissertation concerning the Church and the community. I will now discuss the four fundamental Christian concepts in the following order: ‘revelation,’ ‘primal state,’ ‘sin’ and ‘person,’ particularly the ‘person of Christ.’

Bonhoeffer’s theology of ‘revelation,’ for the most part, the ‘revelation of God’ through Christ that exists in the church community, is an excellent place to start in *Sanctorum Communio* to determine how he unpacks his theology of ‘revelation’ concerning the Church and the community. The following premise will help build the case for a correlation between ‘revelation’ and the ‘doctrine of the church’ in *Sanctorum Communio*:

Premise: For Bonhoeffer, any reality or theology of ‘revelation’ begins with the concept of the doctrine of the church and God:

Every aspect helpful to its comprehension is imparted through revelation. Nothing about it can be ascertained by pure speculation. It cannot speak of the essence of human being,

²⁹ In the original version of his preface Bonhoeffer stresses: “the systematic goal of the work [i.e. *Sanctorum Communio*] is to separate out these different layers [concepts] and to rebuild them into a coherent concept, presupposing the reality of their interrelationship in the concept of church” (DBWE 1:22).

³⁰ Bonhoeffer often enhances his ‘theology of revelation’ with frequent references to his contemporary, Karl Barth’s theology of revelation.

of nature, or of [broken] history in general terms, but only in the context of revelation that has been heard (DBWE 1:60-61).

Bonhoeffer understood that the relationship between the theology of 'revelation' and the church is "to understand the structure of the given reality of the church of Christ, in the context of 'revelation,' as revealed in Christ from the perspective of sociology" (see DBWE 1:33). Ultimately the essence and structure of the new humanity need to be understood in the context of God's revelation through Christ, the given reality of the church of Christ. Equally crucial to Bonhoeffer's purpose, to understand the meaning of God's revelation, as revealed in Christ, is to look at it from different perspectives. From the standpoint of sociology, he proposes that the essence and structure of this new humanity 'in Christ' can only be understood in contrast to humanity in its 'primal social state' as the old humanity 'in Adam' (see DBWE 1:22).

The 'primal social state' (used in correlation to the old humanity 'in Adam' by Bonhoeffer) becomes an overarching concept related to 'revelation.' It is within the context of God's 'revelation' that the given reality of the church through Christ can come about to create new humanity from the old. Bonhoeffer places the 'primal state' within the context of the brokenness of the old humanity and the brokenness of history. It is within this brokenness of humanity in his 'primal state' that the given reality of the church of Christ comes about. Bonhoeffer concedes that it is here in the existence of the church that the revelation of Christ is realised conclusively:

If the revelation in Christ speaks of the will of God to create from the old humanity of Adam a new humanity of Christ, that is, the church, and if I know myself to be incorporated into this church of Christ, then it follows that we should project the idea of unbroken community with God and with human beings back to the doctrine of primal state as well (DBWE 1:62).

Bonhoeffer expresses that although the doctrine of 'primal state' cannot offer new theological insights, this overarching concept, the 'primal state' must be seen as interrelated to 'revelation'. Likewise, the 'primal state' serves as a reminder to the old humanity ('the world of sin') to accept the concrete reality of 'sin' and the need for being taken from 'sin' and placed into a new reality.

When analysing the concept of 'sin' in *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer relates his understanding of 'sin' to his knowledge about the world of Adam that is representative of

humanity's fallen condition. Humanity's fallen state of 'sin' serves as a reminder to the old humanity; that the old humanity can only be placed into a new reality as new humanity through Christ. Consequently, it is through God's revelation in Christ that He sets the old humanity – 'the world of sin' – into a new humanity, Christ's church, the new community. Bonhoeffer's understanding of the 'world of sin' is this:

The world of sin is the world of 'Adam', the old humanity. But the world of Adam is the world of Christ reconciled and made into a new humanity, Christ's church. However, it is not as if Adam was completely overcome; rather, the humanity of Adam lives on in the humanity of Christ (DBWE 1:107).

This concept of 'sin' that the old humanity of Adam lives on in the humanity of Christ carries strong overtures to the Christian concept of 'revelation.' Suggesting that the Christian concept of 'revelation', particularly the 'revelation of God' in Christ humanity, refers to God reconciling of the old humanity into a new humanity, which ultimately becomes Christ's church. Therefore, I imply that Bonhoeffer's concept of the world of 'sin' (world of Adam) correlates with his Christian concept of 'revelation,' the revelation of God, revealed in Christ; simply because Bonhoeffer stresses that the world of 'sin' the 'world of Adam is the world of Christ' (DBWE 1:107). For Bonhoeffer, it is imperative to understand that the humanity of Adam lived on in the humanity of Christ brought about by reconciliation, which occurred through God's 'revelation' in Christ by placing the humanity of Adam into a new humanity, Christ's church the new community.

After dealing with the concept of the world of 'sin', the broken community in *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer seldom returns to a sociological analysis of the church but instead turns his attention to the tangible presence Christ takes up in the world as 'person'. In addressing the Christian concept of 'person' Bonhoeffer asserts:

Every concept of community is essentially related to a concept of person. It is impossible to say what constitutes community without asking what constitutes a person (DBWE 1:34).

The Christian concept of 'person' is inseparably interrelated to the community, i.e., the person always exists with the other, community, and ultimately to God. This Christian concept of 'person' for the most part the 'person' of Christ Bonhoeffer develops by mainly focusing on the following aspect viz., what shape Christ's body takes up in the world in both his humanity

and in the church existing as the Christ. Bonhoeffer predominantly focuses on the concrete 'revelation' of God, from the perspective of the 'person' of Christ entering human history and becoming visible in communities existing as the church community, the community of Christ. The church community exists as a collective³¹ person (the-whole-community-understood-as-a-single-person) concerning the *sanctorum communio*. Mawson (2018:241) asserts that "according to Bonhoeffer, Christ 'exists' as the Christian community in the sense that constitutes it as a new kind of collective person." Bonhoeffer writes:

The church becomes a person insofar as it is in Christ ... The collective person of the church community can be conceived of only in Christ, that is, in his person (DBWE 1, SC-A, 137).

For Bonhoeffer, Christ 'exists' as the Christian community in the sense that Christ as 'person' is "fully present in each individual, and yet he is one. Moreover, again he is not fully present in any one person, but only all human beings together possess the whole Christ" in the Christian community (see DBWE 1:225).

Initially, in this section, I proposed that the overall theme in *Sanctorum Communio* is the 'revelation of God' through Christ and, in turn, Christ exists in the church- community, the church, empirically. This proposal raises several potential ways in which 'revelation' can be considered in the *sanctorum communio*. First, that the concreteness of revelation is the theme and argument of *Sanctorum Communio*. Following that, the primacy of revelation in *Sanctorum Communio*, the concreteness of revelation, can also be conveyed as Christ's 'real presence' in the world as the church community. Bethge in a lecture on Bonhoeffer's life and theology, '*Foundation: The Quest for the Concrete Nature of the Message*' infers that pivotal to Bonhoeffer's message on the concreteness of revelation was this:

Concreteness is the attribute of revelation itself [and] the theme and argument of *Sanctorum Communio* forcibly illustrate the quest for this concreteness (Bethge 1961:33).

With regards to 'revelation' as Christ's 'real presence' in the world as the church community Bonhoeffer often implies that the church becomes the presence of Christ as Christ is also the

³¹ The idea of a 'collective person' Bonhoeffer develops by drawing upon the social-philosophical concept of the 'collective person' in relation to the *sanctorum communio*. The idea of 'collective person' is taken from Scheler's, *Formalism in Ethics* (DBWE 1:77).

presence of God in the community. It is within this community where Christ exists in both his divine and human nature. This aspect of ‘revelation’ seems to be used in *Sanctorum Communio*, always synonymously with Christ’s presence in the world. Marsh assumes this idea of ‘revelation,’ as Christ’s ‘real presence’ in the world and community, accentuates the incarnational aspect of God. Marsh believes that Christ’s ‘real presence’ is “divine abstractness transfigured into the community,” and it is in the community that Christ’s ‘real presence’ exists in the church as Godself present in the community (see Marsh 1992b:437). Marsh elaborates on the idea of ‘Godself’ by saying:

To be sure, the event of the incarnation witnesses to the good news that the universal Spirit and the particular spirit, the infinite Spirit and the finite Spirit, are inseparably connected. Bonhoeffer’s commitment to Luther’s notion of *finitum capax infiniti* enforces the twofold thought of God’s being other in Godself and at the same time really present in community (Marsh 1992b:437).

In sum, then this section has highlighted the importance of developing background to the argument found in *Sanctorum Communio* essential in understanding the construct of the Christian community. I did so by examining the four fundamental Christian concepts viz. ‘revelation,’ ‘primal state,’ ‘sin’ and ‘person’ as identified in *Sanctorum Communio*. Although this was my initial intent, I too propositioned that the overall theme in *Sanctorum Communio* is the concept of the ‘revelation of God’, particularly the revelation of Christ adjoined to the idea that Christ exists in the church community, the church, empirically. However, my final intent was an attempt to discover how Bonhoeffer understood the person of Christ, on the so-called ‘two natures’ of Christ and how it should be inferred. Marsh concedes that Bonhoeffer clearly understood and adhered to the Chalcedonian definition of the so-called ‘two natures’ of Christ. Bonhoeffer’s commitment to “Luther’s notion of *finitum capax infiniti* [that] enforce[d] the twofold thought of God’s being” is an indication that he understood, “the finite is capable of receiving the infinite without loss of the propriety of their distinction” (see Marsh 1992b:437). In brief, I have shown in this section that Bonhoeffer affirmed in *Sanctorum Communio* both the human and divine person of Christ as really concretely present in the community of faith as ‘person’ revealed in the church. It is from this standpoint that I argue that an early form of Bonhoeffer’s Christology may be found in *Sanctorum Communio*.

4.3 Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Sanctorum Communio*

At the onset of writing *Sanctorum Communio* one can deduce that Bonhoeffer was still developing, formulating, and defining his Christology against the dominance of Harnack's liberal theology he encountered in Berlin. The easiest way to coherently explain Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Sanctorum Communio* is first to determine the starting point for his Christology in the text given it is always placed within the context of 'revelation' as I propose in this section. At the same time, this would necessitate a detailed explanation of how Bonhoeffer uses the theme of 'the revelation' of God who becomes human; and how humans encounter God through 'the revelation' of Christ. Equally important is to understand how this encounter and relationship with God through Christ continues to exist. How it exists between the human and the transcendent God through Christ who lives in the church community. More precisely, in this section, I will first briefly explain how Bonhoeffer integrates viz., the concept of 'revelation,' with the 'transcendence of God' concerning 'person'; and how transcendence is interrelated to God's revelation. Following that, I will explain how Bonhoeffer structures his Christology in *Sanctorum Communio*, paying particular attention to the way he describes how God's revelation affects different spheres of Christology.

In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer maintains that the relationships that we encounter with the transcendent God are found amidst our social experiences viz., as a 'person,' in our 'primal state,' and in a world of 'sin.'³² Of these experiences, the most important social experience we encounter with the transcendent God is as a 'person.' For Bonhoeffer, we have this experience only in the church community in our new state; in the church community in our new divine humanity. These experiences in the church community can only be endorsed by the 'revelation' of God, the divine; humanity must encounter the transcendent God. This encounter with the transcendent God amidst the social experience as a 'person' involves the "personal-ethical model of transcendence," a concept that is found and developed throughout Bonhoeffer's theology (see DBWE 1:6). This purely ethical transcendence is experienced by the 'person' when facing decisions; "everything that can be said about the Christian concept of 'person' can

³² When Bonhoeffer uses the phrase 'in a world of sin' he refers to Adam – bearing in mind the old humanity who has been reconciled by Christ into a new humanity, that is, Christ's church community.

only be grasped directly by the person who is facing [ethical] responsibility” (see DBWE 1:52). Meeting ethical responsibility always involves the other ‘person’ – the individual can only exist concerning the other, and this experience must take a concrete moral form in the world. Phillips insists:

The fact that everything which the church says and does in the world is human, does not affect the fact that in her, God reveals himself. The revelation assumes its empirical form in space and time as a human community, the church ... church and world are conceptions which must always occur together, since they exist solely for each other (Phillips 1967:133f).

In sum, transcendence in the *sanctorum communio* has to do with God’s revelation and is not merely some metaphysical transcendence, but transcendence found within the world where God reveals himself. Although Bonhoeffer will continually allude to transcendence in *Sanctorum Communio*, one has to read between the lines carefully. Bonhoeffer uses distinctive approaches to explain different aspects of the transcendence of God. One example of Bonhoeffer’s unique path to transcendence is this: Humans encounter with the transcendent God happens when God reveals God’s self (God’s I). God does not meet a person as You³³ but enters into the person as God’s I, meaning that God enters into a *relationship* with the person. The encounter of the I with God’s I are inseparably joined because this relation stresses the unity that exists between the transcendent God and humans. Therefore, the agreement between the transcendent God and the church-community; exists as the church as the community of Christ. If read between the lines, in essence, Bonhoeffer is saying God continues to live with humanity in His divinity in the church as the community of Christ – where Christ exists. For that reason, the divine-human becomes an exemplar both to the human and divine aspects of God, which can be displayed solely in the community of faith. It is only in his 1933 Christology lectures that Bonhoeffer works out all the implications of the human and divine aspects of God in Christ alluded to in *Sanctorum Communio*. In brief, Bonhoeffer’s Christology begins with transcendence; the transcendent God reveals himself and becomes human. It is from this stance of ‘revelation’ that Bonhoeffer will structure his Christology.

³³ I will discuss the I-You-relation in detail later afterward in my discussion on the structure of Bonhoeffer’s Christology in relation to the *sanctorum communio*.

To make sense of and offer an explanation on how Bonhoeffer structures his Christology in *Sanctorum Communio*, I first have to take particular note of how Bonhoeffer advances his argument in *Sanctorum Communio*. In Chapters Two through Four, he deals with the aspects of creation, sin, and revelation. In contrast, in Chapter Five, he deals extensively with the sanctorum communio in all its relationships to God, Christ, the Holy Spirit as the community of faith existing in Christ. Chapter Five is the lengthiest part of *Sanctorum Communio* and somewhat repetitive and, in all probability, would be the best place to start to determine how Bonhoeffer structures his Christology from the perspective of the sanctorum communio. Regarding this chapter Clifford Green, in his *Trinity and Christology in Bonhoeffer and Barth*, argues “that the more detailed discussion of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit is found in the massive fifth chapter” (see Green 2000:7). For Green, *Sanctorum Communio* should be seen from a Trinitarian theological perspective and not a Christological perspective. Green posits:

Perhaps the book in which Bonhoeffer most nearly approaches Barth in giving a trinitarian structure to his theology is *Sanctorum Communio*...In light of the ways God the Creator, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are essential to the argument of *Sanctorum Communio*, I think we should conclude that this first work is implicitly, if not explicitly, trinitarian (Green 2000:6,7).

However, I sense the significance of Chapter Five is more than just a Trinitarian treatise, on the contrary, it resembles a carefully designed pattern laid out by Bonhoeffer, for the form of the sanctorum communio.

The pattern laid out is this: in *Sanctorum Communio* the sanctorum communio is the community wherein ‘Christ exists as a church community.’ This means that the outworking of this community is Bonhoeffer’s primary focus. More so, Bonhoeffer particularly epitomises the different aspects related to the sanctorum communio, which leads us to the most common axiom found in *Sanctorum Communio*, i.e., ‘Christ existing as church community’ and not to Trinitarian theology.

At this juncture, I offer two preliminary notions pertinent to understanding the construct of Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Sanctorum Communio*. In the first place, Bonhoeffer’s Christology becomes the structure for the church community, and in turn, church determines the Christology. This relationship of the church to Christ needs to be understood in the

following way:

The church is already completed in Christ, time is suspended. The church is to be built within time upon Christ as the firm foundation. Christ is the historical principle of the church (DBWE 1:153).

Besides, the community in Christ becomes a Christological community and presents the social presence of Christ in the church. Bonhoeffer stresses (DBWE 1:126) that,

It is necessary to delineate the new social-basic relations, which are established by the fact of Christ, as constitutive in the deepest sense for a social body like the church ... grounded in the reality of God and God's revelation.

It follows then "when personal social relations are modified, or recreated, in the concept of the church, the concrete form of the community must change as well" (see DBWE 1:125). The church is the place where the social aspect of Christ empirically dwells.

The first aspect of Christology in *Sanctorum Communio* that merits investigating is Bonhoeffer's emphasis on, and structuring of, the concept of vicarious representative action (*Stellvertretung*) "as the sum and substance of Christology" (see DBWE 1:155). Important to note is that the idea of the vicarious representative action of Christ in *Sanctorum Communio* becomes the prelude to Bonhoeffer's later theme of the 'pro-me' structure of the God-human found in the *Christology* lectures. I believe that Bonhoeffer structures a Christology around the vicarious representative action (*Stellvertretung*) of Christ in several ways to bring together the relationship that exists between Christ's work and the church; these are inextricably linked. In the first place, the Christ who is humiliated and exalted for us is also the Christ who becomes 'the Man for others,' a prominent theme developed in *Sanctorum Communio*. In the second place, the vicarious representative action that established this relationship between fallen human and the God-human ushers the new human into an empirical church and empirical reality, so then the *sanctorum communio* becomes the exercise of relations between Christ and the church. In sum, then, for Bonhoeffer, "what characterises the Christian notion of vicarious representative action is that it is vicariously representative strictly with respect to sin ... vicarious representative action for sin does take place" (see DBWE 1:155). Sin is taken care of "through the Christian principle of vicarious representative action" that leads to the new humanity "being made whole again and sustained" (see DBWE 1:156). In fact, "in Christ's

vicarious representative action, [God] restores the community between God and human beings, so the community of human beings with each other has also become a reality” (see DBWE 1:157). Therefore, this reality, the relationships we encounter with each other amidst social conflicts allows us to continue to exist as the community. The relationships that we restore with the other, as we meet the God-human through his ‘revelation’ (revealed in his divinity and humanity) in the church, allows us to continue to exist as the community of ‘Christ existing as the church.’

After establishing that we encounter God’s ‘revelation’ in the church through Christ’s vicarious representative action, Bonhoeffer continues to structure his Christology in the *sanctorum communio* around the concrete meaning of community. This means that the place is where ‘Christ exists as a church community’ empirically. This idea is a modification of Hegel’s concept ‘God existing as church community’ to a more Christological concept ‘Christ exists as a church community.’ (Marsh 1992b:428) suggests that this modification is Bonhoeffer’s way of distinguishing “his Christological formulation of the community from Hegel’s understanding of community.” The idea ‘Christ exists as church community’ for Bonhoeffer signifies the new social-relation³⁴ established by Christ, i.e., the social-body the church. Bonhoeffer emphasises:

This clearly shows that the new social relations ... came about through the revelation of God’s heart in Christ, and through God implanting God’s own heart, God’s will and Spirit, in human beings, thus realizing God’s will for the church-community to exist (DBWE 1:166).

The idea ‘Christ exists as church community’ as the ‘revelation of God’s heart’ in Christ can be explained as follows: God revealed God’s self (God’s ‘I’) in the church, and it is in the church that the other becomes an ‘I’ shown in love. The idea of ‘God giving (revealing) himself’ must not be misconstrued as when the ‘I’ approaches the ‘You’ that God gives me of himself (His transcendence) but instead be seen as God giving of himself to the church becoming concrete in Christ. When ‘Christ exists as church community’ concerning the ‘revelation of God’s heart’ is understood in this way, humans can be perceived as being the

³⁴ This idea Bonhoeffer felt was necessary to delineate because the ‘new social relations’ are ‘established by the fact of Christ, as constitutive in the deepest sense for a social body like the church’ (see DBWE 1:126ff).

image of the divine 'You' who directed the community from the I-You relationship³⁵ to become concrete in Jesus Christ. On the whole, Bonhoeffer's idea of the concrete place where Christ exists as the divine-human in *Sanctorum Communio* always remains the same 'Christ exists as a church community'. There is no question that Bonhoeffer cannot imagine God's incarnate Word, the divine-human existing in any other place than in the church community as both human and divine.

Bonhoeffer continuously elaborates on the idea 'Christ exists as church community' by stressing that the New Testament knows this form of revelation Christ existing in the church community, viz., that God predetermined³⁶ "us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4f). Jesus Christ dwells in the church as both human and divine. Bonhoeffer asserts that,

The church community exists through Christ's action. It is elected in Christ from eternity ... The church is already completed in Christ; just as in Christ its beginning is established. Christ is the cornerstone and the foundation of the building, and yet the church, composed of all its parts, is also Christ's body. Christ is the firstborn among many sisters and brothers and yet all are one in Christ (DBWE 1:137, 142).

There is no question for Bonhoeffer that God's spoken word in eternity confirmed in the New Testament, through the concrete place of the Christ, becomes a reality in the church. This reality is representative of Christ existing in the church as both human and divine. Following this, of significant concern for Bonhoeffer in *Sanctorum Communio* is the problem of discerning to what extent the reality of God's revelation can lead to the Christian concept of church. Can claims be made that in the church, the concrete place of the Christ can be established or accepted? Bonhoeffer says:

Only the concept of revelation can lead to the Christian concept of church. Once the claim of the church has been accepted, however, it is as superfluous as it is impossible to prove its necessity on general grounds. The situation here is not different from the case of the Christological efforts that seek to demonstrate the necessity of redemption after its reality

³⁵ In this relationship the social basic category is the I-You. The You of the other person is the divine You. For Bonhoeffer God does not enter the person as You, but enters into the person as I. These ideas are all retained in the Christian concept of 'person'. Regarding the Christian doctrine of 'person' what is important to Bonhoeffer is to discover whether the 'person' must necessarily be thought of in relation to the 'other' and if so this insight is of utmost importance in understanding the concept of the church. Individuals exist only in relation to an 'other' as the 'other' moves to an ethical space (see DBWE 1:55).

³⁶ For Bonhoeffer in God's mind the church existed from eternity to eternity.

has already been grasped (DBWE 1:130).

On the whole, I have indicated that Bonhoeffer's ideas, on the church, and the concrete place where 'Christ existing as church community' provided him with a framework to explain how 'revelation' is interrelated to different spheres of Christology as aforementioned. Following this, in *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer continues to use the term 'real presence of Christ' (the form thereof) concerning 'revelation.' This aspect will be dealt with in more detail from this point onward, and I will establish how relevant this aspect is to Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Sanctorum Communio*. I will mainly consider the way Bonhoeffer explains the 'real presence' of Christ and how God's revelation affects different spheres of Christology.

In Bonhoeffer's detailed outline dealing with the *Major themes in the New Testament's view of the Church* and the Church's form of revelation, found in the dissertation typescript of *Sanctorum Communio* (SC-A), we detect Bonhoeffer's first thoughts on the 'real presence' of Christ. To begin with, for Bonhoeffer in the same way as the 'real presence' of Christ is decisive, so to "the social significance of Christ is decisive" (see DBWE 1:140). The social significance is evident wherever the "church community is united by preaching and Lord's Supper in mutual Christian love" (see DBWE 1:140). In essence, preaching and the Lord's Supper concerning the 'real presence' of Christ can be understood as the 'human' and 'divine' presence of Christ. Christ can be understood as 'human' because the Lord's Supper can be thought of as a representative of the real presence of Christ. Christ can be understood as 'divine' because Christ can be considered as a representative of God's revelation. The 'real presence' of Christ occurs when the saints are together and commune where both preaching and the Lord's Supper occurs in the church community; this is when 'Christ is present only in the church.' This shift in understanding God's revelation as being decisive; that is, Christ is only present in the church community, created further doctrinal difficulties in *Sanctorum Communio*. Bonhoeffer cautions although such challenges arise regarding the decisive 'real presence' of Christ, as both human and divine, within the church community, one must not use this instance to think of the second incarnation of Christ (for example in the individual human being). One must instead think of it as a form of revelation that may be called 'Christ existing as church community' (see DBWE 1:138). Conclusively, the church is the 'real presence' of

Christ in the same way that Christ is the presence of God – ‘Christ [God] exists as a community’. Green (1999) confirms that here Bonhoeffer altered Hegel’s statement, ‘God existing as a community’ by replacing one word ‘Christ,’ thereby modifying the phrase to Christ existing as community. This revision of Hegel’s phrase ‘God existing as a community’ to Christ existing as a community then becomes the ‘Christological concentration of Bonhoeffer's axiom’ in *Sanctorum Communio*. This phrase ‘Christ existing as the community’ evolved into the idea “that the church results from the divine initiative, that is, Christ bears a divine form in the community” (see Green 1999:120).

I have noticed thus far a shift in the way Bonhoeffer understood God’s revelation. It is decisive; Christ is only present in the church community; one is brought into the church (into the humanity of Christ) only by the act of appropriation that became possible only on “the basis of God’s act in Christ” – revelation “as a completion (of reality)” (see DBWE 1:143). Bonhoeffer insists that if ‘revelation’ is not viewed “as a completion (of reality)” it would take away what is decisive about the revelation of God – that is the divine-human Jesus Christ, became the revelation of both the divine and human natures of God (see DBWE 1:143).

An additional aspect of ‘revelation’ that Bonhoeffer deals with in more detail in *Sanctorum Communio* is how the ‘church is founded on the revelation of God’s heart.’ The relevance of this aspect for Bonhoeffer, i.e., in structuring an augment to develop his Christology, is explained in various ways in a section in chapter five of *Sanctorum Communio*: The Church Established in and through Christ-Its Realisation (DBWE 1:145). This section in *Sanctorum Communio* plays an essential part in understanding the background to Bonhoeffer’s argument for the ‘church as founded on the revelation of God’s heart’ in the sanctorum communio for the following reasons. First of all, because “the cord between God and human beings that were cut by the first Adam is tied anew by God, by [revelation], by giving God’s self as an I, opening God’s own heart” (DBWE 1:145).

Consequently, seeing that the cord between God and humanity is now tied to Christ’s humanity anew, humanity is soon drawn into a community with God. Even though in the one Adam, there are many Adams, yet there is only one Christ. Adam is the “representative human being,”

but Christ is the Lord of his new humanity (see DBWE 1:146). Last, of all, the entire new humanity is established in reality in Jesus Christ, who represents the whole history of humanity in Christ's historical life. Christ's history is marked by the fact that in it, humanity-in-Adam is transformed into humanity-in-Christ (see DBWE 1:147). In sum, then this idea "humanity-in-Adam" Bonhoeffer stresses could allude either to a "community with God" or to a "human community created in the image of God" (see DBWE 1:61). If looked at concurrently, as a community "with" God and a community "created in the image of God," Bonhoeffer stresses it could point to parallelism. The parallelism drawn is explained as "also part of the future destiny of humanity [our humanity-in-Christ], consistent with the parallelism of Adam and Christ – [that] brings us to the church" (see DBWE 1:61). It brings us to the church because for Bonhoeffer, and the "church is founded on the revelation of God's heart" (see DBWE 1:145).

To summarise, in this section, I set out to find the easiest way to explain Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Sanctorum Communio* coherently. Also, an explanation of Bonhoeffer's Christology is always placed within the context of 'revelation,' offering a detailed description of how Bonhoeffer uses the theme of 'revelation' to explain his Christology and for my purpose of this study to determine how Bonhoeffer understood the 'two natures' of Christ. Concerning the 'two natures' of Christ in this section, I deduce that Bonhoeffer's understanding of humanity from Adam to Christ, should be understood 'qualitatively,' that is, Adam's was the first sin and "first sins are the only that there are. Christ was human and divine; he stood in and beyond history" (see DBWE 1:110). This explanation expressed by Bonhoeffer also translates into his understanding of *Mensch* (expounded later in the *Ethics*). "Adam is [the] 'representative human being' [*der Mensch*], but Christ is the lord of his new humanity" (see DBWE 1:146). Adam differs from Christ in the sense that "Christ has a function that sheds the clearest light on their differences," viz., the function of the 'vicarious representative action' [*Stellvertretung*] as explained beforehand in this section (see DBWE 1:146). This Christological statement, 'vicarious representative action' conspicuously remains part of Bonhoeffer's theological development in *Sanctorum Communio* and his later writings, and

needs to be further examined in the light of Bonhoeffer's understanding of the 'two natures' of Christ as propounded in *Sanctorum Communio*.

4.4 Interpretation of the 'two natures' of Christ in *Sanctorum Communio*

The earliest confirmation of Bonhoeffer alluding to his views on the 'two natures' of Christ found in *Sanctorum Communio* can be linked to the idea as mentioned earlier of 'vicarious representative action' [*Stellvertretung*] concerning the human Christ who took on this action to recreate community. In this section of the study, I will first briefly continue to develop Bonhoeffer's idea of 'vicarious representative action' and the responsibility that Christ takes on for the sake of humanity – in his human nature (DBWE 1:120). After that, I will examine Bonhoeffer's impression of the empirical church as Christ existing as the community and how Christ's presence on earth is representative of the divine and human nature of Christ; and how the body of Christ is a real presence in history. Last, of all, I will examine Bonhoeffer's notion of revelation as being thought of only in social relations. In doing so, I will mainly focus on the I-Thou relationship in the sanctorum communio and its claim to transcendence. All of this will be done in the hope of unearthing Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the 'two natures' of Christ as alluded to in *Sanctorum Communio* and how Bonhoeffer understood the 'two natures' of Christ.

The Christological statement 'vicarious representative action' developed in *Sanctorum Communio* carries the same weight as in his later writings. Bonhoeffer's premise in developing this idea is always based on God's relationships that he holds with human beings. God's revelation establishes this relationship through the human Christ, who takes on 'vicarious representative action' to recreate the community. Bonhoeffer understood that the 'vicarious representative action' of Christ was deeply rooted in sociology, ecclesiology, and Christology; they are interrelated. He explains:

Thus the church is established in and through Christ in the three basic sociological relationships known to us: his death isolates the individuals; the new humanity is seen synoptically in Christ; and the love of God, in Christ's 'vicarious representative action' [*Stellvertretung*], restores the community between God and human beings (DBWE 1:157).

The above summary of Christ's action, by definition, confirms Bonhoeffer's understanding of

the theological concept of Christ's 'vicarious representative action'³⁷ [*Stellvertretung*]. It is by this confirmation, i.e., that Bonhoeffer's asserts his understanding of the humanity of Jesus, viz., that the Christ for humanity's sake assumed responsibility for their salvation by becoming human. Kelly accentuates that this theological concept 'vicarious representative action' is where we first encounter a leitmotif for Bonhoeffer's theology as a whole, "the sociality of Christ and humanity" (see Kelly 1984:74). In effect, both human-beings themselves (particularly in the church) and the divine-human being Jesus the Christ must be understood as fundamentally social beings. Because of this, Kelly suggests that the sociality of the church is defined by what Bonhoeffer calls the *Stellvertretung* or 'vicarious representative action' of the God-human as the crucified Christ (Kelly 1984:75). For Bonhoeffer, regardless of the imperfection of humanity, God made Himself available to the community on a social level through the 'vicarious representative action' of the divine-human, the crucified Christ. Therefore, the church has become the institution existing as Christ as church community; this is only made possible through the 'vicarious representative action' of the divine-human, which allows Him to live in the church empirically.

The institution of the church, the empirical church, as Christ existing as a community, converges at Christ's humanity – being present on earth. For Bonhoeffer, the practical church point toward:

The empirical church [is] a concrete historical community, in the relativity of its form, and in its imperfect and modest appearance, it is the body of Christ, Christ presence on earth, for it has his word ... the objective spirit of the church is the bearer of the historical impact of Jesus Christ and the social impact of the Holy Spirit (DBWE 1:209f).

Bonhoeffer's understanding of the empirical church can be explained as follows: In the first place, "Christ entered history" therefore, the church becomes Christ's presence in history, and "the history of the church is the hidden center of world history" (see DBWE 1:211). The church remains in this form, the empirical church, as long as Christ is present in the church in his word; for the church is Christ existing as a church community, and the church exists as a community-of-the-cross (see DBWE 1:213). Without a doubt, Bonhoeffer understood "the body of Christ

³⁷ 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 human nature (DBWE 1:120 footnote 29).

is a real presence in history and at the same time the norm for its history” (see DBWE 1:211). This real presence of Christ in history can only be actualised in Christ’s person as the divine-human and in his position in the church and as the Christ existing in the sanctorum communion. In other words, one can imply that Christ in his person and place signifies that God intended Christ to live in His divine position in the church. There is no question in Bonhoeffer’s mind that “in and through Christ the church is established in reality” and “in God’s eyes the Church is present in Christ” through the actual revelation of Christ (as the divine-human) – representative of the ‘two natures’ of Christ (see DBWE 1:157). This idea of the genuine revelation of Christ (as the divine-human) for Bonhoeffer must also be thought of in social relations.

Let us now look at the aspect of revelation considered by Bonhoeffer to exist only in social relations. The idea of revelation being thought of in social relations often appears in tandem to Bonhoeffer’s notion of transcendence. This notion must not be seen as a shift to another aspect of revelation but more so an explanation of God’s transcendence and how it is related to the sociological perspective of revelation. In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer insists that one must, and one actually can think of revelation in terms of social relations because of the following reasons. In the first place, all the excellent old dogmatic terms and loci – grace, justification, etc. – have a genuinely social sphere. They are social facts. Sequentially revelation exists in these social spheres viz., as the fellowship of persons as ‘Christ existing as the community of men’ – that is the declaration of Jesus’ humanity. Therefore it is here in these contexts of ‘social relations’ that Bonhoeffer introduces the ‘I-You’³⁸ relation, more precisely, the ‘You’ relation in the ‘I-You’ relation, stressing that the ‘You’ is created and willed by God which become visible in social life. In effect, each human ‘You’ is the image of God’s ‘You’ under which we experience God within the context of ‘social relations’ (see DBWE 1: 50-56). These ideas on ‘social relations’ expressed by Bonhoeffer are all related to God’s transcendence: Revelation exists in relation to another person that speaks to a concrete ‘I-

³⁸ In the latest DBWE *Sanctorum Communio* the ‘I-Thou’ phrase is translated ‘I-You’. I will use this phrase concurrently particularly giving preference to secondary scholarship usage of the phrase ‘I-Thou’.

You'³⁹ – signifying that the God-human can only exist in the community of men. In turn, preference is given to persons who become the image of the divine 'You' in directing the community from the 'I-You' relationship toward a concrete 'You' in relation to the God-human Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer's concern is the relationship between the person, God, and the social being hold toward each other – one person must become Christ for the other.

Since, however, one person's becoming 'You' for an other fundamentally alters nothing about the 'You' as person, that person as I is not holy; what's holy is the 'You' of God, the absolute will, who here becomes visible in the concrete 'You' of social life ... the social basic category is the I-You-relation. The You of the other person is the divine You (DBWE 1:55).

More importantly, for Bonhoeffer, thinking of revelation only in terms of social relations precludes the idea of 'ethical' or 'social' transcendence over against philosophical transcendence, but is even opposed to any philosophical notion of transcendence or metaphysics called God. God's being is not in transcendent isolation and absence but is revealed as present to us in the world. One could presuppose that this presence is experienced through the 'two natures' of Christ existing in the church. Green (1999) also accentuates this idea – "God is revealed as present to us in the world – God's being is being in relation-to-us. The meaning of the incarnation is this: God with us and God for us" (see Green 1999:114). Green accentuates that God's human existence as God-human is fundamentally relational, and Bonhoeffer's "focus in *Sanctorum Communio* has always been Christocentric ... but Christology is in the foreground" (see Green 1999:114). Bonhoeffer's Christological focus in *Sanctorum Communio* then becomes the explanation for God's incarnation in Jesus Christ, revealed in the community of faith (see Green 1999:115).

In discussing the aforementioned 'I-You' relationship – with regards to social relations – toward a concrete 'You' in Bonhoeffer's theology, Feil suggests that the foundation of Bonhoeffer's dissertation contains apparent variances. There is first the development of the Christian concept of a person (social relations) and the introduction to the 'I-Thou scheme' "when the 'I' finds its boundary in the 'You' and real transcendence is attained as ethical transcendence" (see Feil 1985: 61). Additionally, Feil suggests that Bonhoeffer does not incorporate Jesus Christ in his

³⁹ The human you is a form of the divine you – transcendence – in present otherness.

discussion of the 'I-Thou' scheme. God is the 'Thou,' therefore, every human being is a divine 'Thou,' and it follows that every human is also the divine 'Thou' (Feil 1985: 61). Conclusively, Feil, in his studies on the 'I-You' relation, purports that there is no mention of Jesus Christ found in this context (Feil 1985: 62). However, if carefully examined the idea of Feil's of 'remote otherness' (that the 'I-Thou' relationship exists only between God and humanity) cannot be entirely accurate. Ramifications of this position are this: Bonhoeffer's development of the Christian concept of person, and ideas on the 'I-Thou' relationship becomes an essential part, for understanding *Sanctorum Communio* and also grasping the relationship of transcendence to the 'I-Thou' association, in which the revelation of God exists in relation to the person. At the same time, the revelation of God becomes the concrete place of the God-human as Christ existing in the community in relation to the God-human Jesus Christ.

On the whole, I believe Bonhoeffer's 'Thou' is a claim of transcendence, and each human 'Thou' is the image of God's 'Thou.' The 'Thou' is an idea in *Sanctorum Communio* which heightens the aspect of the transcendence of God. To put it another way, this experience of transcendence comes only via the God-human, Christ, the human who exists in the community of faith, the church. Therefore, it is in Christ the human 'Thou' where God meets us not in remote otherness but as 'real and present' in the community of faith.

Green in discussing this idea of the transcendence of God as 'real and present' suggests that this idea found in *Sanctorum Communio* is to be "understood as 'community' and expressed as 'ethical personalism'" (see Green 1999:124). "'God's transcendence is not remote otherness or absence,' but it is 'real and present'" (see Green 1999:124). For Green, Bonhoeffer's Christology is simultaneously "incarnational and communal," meaning that the presence of the God-human is found in the community (see Green 1999:124). Community is understood in terms of ethical personalism. God's transcendence is not remote otherness or absence. Still, it is embodied precisely in the other person who is real and present, encountering me in the heart of my existence with the judgement and grace of the gospel. I posit that this idea of Green's captures a complete expression of Bonhoeffer's view of the 'two natures' of Christ found in *Sanctorum Communio* (see Green 1999:124).

Taken together, all the different concepts on revelation discussed thus far in this chapter suggest that these concepts contain all the explosives which will catch fire again and again in Bonhoeffer's life and theology. There are significant amounts of positive correlations found between revelation, social relations, and transcendence, particularly as examined in this section on the relationship of transcendence to the 'I-Thou' relationship, in which the revelation of God exists in relation to the person. Bonhoeffer's continual emphases on God's revelation (God-human) as the claim for the concrete place of Christ existing in the community seem to be at the heart of Bonhoeffer's theology in *Sanctorum Communio*. Bonhoeffer recognised that the other Thou, I encounter with God had Christological implications if the starting place is found in the God-human. There cannot be any speculation about God before or outside this concreteness. The incarnate God is the only one we know. We cannot even think of concreteness as an addition God made later to his being. All we know, and this is breath-taking, is that incarnate concreteness is the attribute as far as we can think. There is no God; Bonhoeffer often emphasises, other than the incarnate One the God-human (see DBWE 1:34-36).

Jürgen Weissbach in assessing the Christological implications of the other Thou, I encounter with God with its starting place found in the God-human explains as follows:

Since in the other Thou, I encounter the divine Thou; my way to him is like the way of faith to God, the way of recognition or rejection. Therefore, the Christian person achieves his true nature when God does not confront him as Thou, but 'enters into' him as I. Here we meet the Christological concept of the entry of I God which is so crucial for Bonhoeffer. Thus, in the final analysis, Bonhoeffer's concept of the person has a Christological basis in the God-man – the incarnation – God becoming human through Jesus Christ (Weissbach 1967:101-102).

In the same manner, Green in assessing Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Sanctorum Communio*, adequately and at length confirms that:

In a profound departure from Patristic soteriology, which held that God became human in order that human beings might be deified, Bonhoeffer, states: God became human in order that we might become human. The incarnation is about the humanisation of the human race, not its divinisation; it is about restoring and redeeming humanity to its true but lost nature in community with God and fellow human beings. Bonhoeffer's approach to the Christian church community reminds one of Athanasius, the champion of Nicene Christianity. In his *On the Incarnation of the Word*, Athanasius presented the biblical narrative as the story of God's creatures, who were created out of nothing and were entirely dependent on their Creator, and who slid into corruption and non-being as a result of sin. In the incarnation, cross and resurrection, the same Logos through whom the world

was created comes to save the world by what is, in effect, an act of re-creation. In short, the church community is humanity being made and redeemed as a result of God's creative grace (Green 1999:121).

In sum then, Kelly underlines the importance of understanding how God assumes responsibility in *Sanctorum Communio*. To begin with, God's existence *pro nobis* (for us) becomes the condition that has "made the 'new humanity' possible" (see Kelly 1984:90). Following that, Christ's death and resurrection reveal God's tangible love at the root of all community life and overcomes sin and death (see Kelly 1984:90). Of great concern for Kelly's is to establish indeed that the humanity of Christ all correlates with Bonhoeffer's theological concept of Christ's 'vicarious representative action' [*Stellvertretung*]. That is that the God-human *pro nobis* (for us) assumes responsibility for humanity's salvation – Christ (God-human) restores humanity's communion with God, thereby creating a 'new humanity' (see Kelly 1984:90).

4.5 Concluding Remarks

Bonhoeffer's ideas, as expressed in *Sanctorum Communio*, offer a clear indication that he maintained a Chalcedonian theology that he formulated overtly in *Sanctorum Communio*, particularly on the relation of God's revelation through Christ who exists in the church community. The church becomes the divine reality of God through the revelation of Christ. Bethge defends Bonhoeffer's Chalcedonian theology in *Sanctorum Communio* by suggesting:

Bonhoeffer was an admirer of the decision of Chalcedon. He defended its wisdom in not reconciling the paradoxes and its witness to the person of the God-man Jesus Christ. The decisive notion of Christ's being the 'person' was explicitly developed by Bonhoeffer as early as *Sanctorum Communio* (Bethge 1967:71).

It would, therefore, be an accurate rendering in this chapter to say that Bonhoeffer understood the 'two natures' of Christ in relation to the classic Chalcedon definition that can be traced in *Sanctorum Communio*. Simultaneously Bonhoeffer constructed an incarnational church (community) in *Sanctorum Communio* with a sociological significance in the following ways: At first, he did this by using and exploring phrases such as 'God's revelation' 'community' and 'divine reality.' One can presume that Bonhoeffer hoped to define the phrase 'revelation of God' as the divine God who is bona fide Christ. Subsequently, for Bonhoeffer, the only way the Divine could achieve an unqualified revelation was through an active community, viz., the church – with a result, the 'incarnational church.' On the whole, nothing directly is said by

Bonhoeffer in *Sanctorum Communio* about Christ's divinity other than the 'revelation' of the divine nature of God being designated to the church through Christ. Significantly Bonhoeffer in *Sanctorum Communio* weaves together the sociological and religious aspects of the church into a community, i.e., a church that exists as a church for others. This defines the sociological and ethical issues of the church – Christ lives as a community known today as the church, i.e., as the 'body of the incarnate One' – the God-human. More precisely, in *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer confesses that there is no other God than one known to us as the incarnate, the God-human, by laying claim to the community as "Christ existing as a community of men, the church" (see DBWE 1:33). The God from the outside turns to us, humans *Deus extra nos, pro nobis* (see DBWE 1:33-35). This phrase used by Bonhoeffer is found in Anselm of Canterbury's *Why God became Man*. Bonhoeffer employs these phrases as a Christological model by laying claim to Anselm's perception that the church is the reality that exists as a community of men. Therefore, for Bonhoeffer in doctrinal theology, necessity can be deduced only from reality:

This follows from the concept of revelation. When works of doctrinal theology end up by presenting the concept of the church as a necessary consequence of the Protestant faith, this must not imply anything other than the inner connection between the reality of the church and the entire reality of revelation... In order to establish clarity about the inner logic of theological construction, it would be good for once if a presentation of doctrinal theology were to start not with the doctrine of God but with the doctrine of the church (DBWE 1:134).

In this chapter, I have obtained satisfactory results showing that 'revelation' played an essential part in understanding both Bonhoeffer's theology and Christology in *Sanctorum Communio*. My research also highlighted that although Bonhoeffer's dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, was set out initially to be a sociological treatise, it evolved into an ecclesial paper, or more precisely, a Christological treatise. I deduced that Bonhoeffer constructs his Christology in meaningful ways. First, Bonhoeffer places a strong emphasis on the idea of 'Thou,' more correctly emphasizes the image of the divine Thou, which is inextricably linked to the 'other' and every human. Secondly, another side to Christology Bonhoeffer develops in *Sanctorum Communio* is the idea of 'fallen humanity.' This idea expressed the end of communion with God and other humans as explained in the following way – despite humanity's quandary even

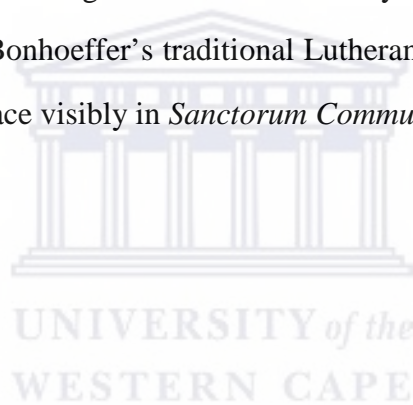
in his 'fallen' condition, God's love still reached out and restored the broken cord between humans and God through the human Christ as both divine and human. These ideas, the 'Thou,' and 'fallen humanity,' become two essential associations in the formulation of Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Sanctorum Communio*. These ideas allowed Bonhoeffer to furatively explore concepts of 'revelation of God' to the point of advancing God's divine reality in the church. Through announcing Christ in the church, Bonhoeffer presents a community in which the 'divine revelation' dwells through Christ. In *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer's expression, 'the revelation of God' is applied skillfully about the revelation of the God-human through Christ that is realised and animated in the community of saints. Therefore, in the church, the human aspect of Christ brings together all humans' I, and Christ's vicarious representative action' stands as an archetype 'for them,' the I's, before God. In this way, the human Christ becomes the originator of the new human, the I-Thou – and ultimately 'Christ exists as the Church.'

I have also noted that scholars often propose that Christology and ecclesiology form one single theme in *Sanctorum Communio*, thereby bringing about unity in Bonhoeffer's thoughts. Ostensibly, this postulation might seem acceptable since Bonhoeffer does put the church in the centre of human understanding of God, that is, that communion with God exists only through the human Christ who is present only in the church. However, it can be contended that in *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer describes the church in different ways. At the onset, the church belongs solely to the human Christ; Following that, the church is present in the human Christ realised before time; In the end, the church becomes the visible form of the human Christ's existence.

In this chapter, I showed that the 'revelation of God' exists in Christ, the community of Christ, the church. If all put together, it points to a fixed development of Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Sanctorum Communio*. Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Sanctorum Communio* can plainly be explained like this: Presently, the 'revelation of God' in Christ and Christ exists in as the church as a community, both divine and human (the notion of the 'two natures' of Christ). In his analysis of Bonhoeffer's idea of 'revelation of God,' Godsey proposes that the "revelation of

God in Jesus Christ” which is developed in Bonhoeffer’s writing (*Sanctorum Communio*) would thus “provide us with the real clue to the development within his Christology itself” (see Godsey 1960:265).

It may become apparent in the next chapters on Bonhoeffer’s later writings that after this dissertation *Sanctorum Communio* that his theology is informed and shaped by his Christology and his Lutheran background that he never relinquishes. In his later writings, Bonhoeffer will continue to solidify Luther’s theology of the cross – *the vicarious representation* – in his Christology *àpropos*, the ‘two natures’ of Christ. Plausibly Bonhoeffer’s Lutheran viewpoint would then bring about continuity in his theology on the ‘two natures’ of Christ – the Chalcedonian definition – in one form or another. Bonhoeffer’s viewpoint will always stand at the centre of Bonhoeffer’s Christological orientation – only if we venture to examine his Lutheran theology at its core. Bonhoeffer’s traditional Lutheran conception of church and his Chalcedonian Christology surface visibly in *Sanctorum Communio*.



Chapter 5 Act and Being

5.1 Introduction

Following his return to Berlin in 1929, Bonhoeffer wrote a habilitation thesis titled *Akt und Sein*, approved by the Faculty of Theology of the University of Berlin in July 1930, granting him access to a position as lecturer at the University. *Akt und Sein* was published in German in 1931 and as *Act and Being* in 1962.

Act and Being is abstract and is presumably the most complex book Bonhoeffer wrote. It is difficult to interpret, read and analyse, because in *Act and Being*⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer investigates the influence of transcendental philosophy on Protestant theology and questions the array of philosophical approaches with regards to the problem of revelation. Besides, Bonhoeffer addresses the interpretation of revelation concerning the act and being, namely, ‘the being of God’ about God’s self-revelation. He explains:

The problem of act and being is the question of the objectivity of the concept of God and determining the relationship that exists between ‘the being of God’ and the mental act which grasps that being. In other words, the meaning of ‘the being of God in revelation’ must be interpreted theologically ... and how faith as act and revelation as being are related to one another (DBWE 2:26f).

Bonhoeffer stresses that “the interpretation of revelation in terms of act and being are truly combined,” and the concept of revelation has to be “thought about within the concreteness of the conception of the church” (DBWE 2:31, 102). Finally, for Bonhoeffer, the dialectic of act and being needs to be interpreted “theologically as the dialectic of faith and the congregation of Christ”; the one cannot exist without the other (see DBWE 2:31). It is in the community of

⁴⁰ Often Bonhoeffer’s theology in *Act and Being* correlates with the theology of Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Since my purpose in this paper is not to find a correlation between Bonhoeffer and Heidegger I limit myself to Bonhoeffer’s interpretations suggested by Marsh (1994:119) as follows: What interests Bonhoeffer is Heidegger’s refusal to answer the question of being by reference to another being (Seiend). Instead he begins with the difference between being and beings. This approach plays a significant role in shaping Bonhoeffer’s claim that the revealing act of God in Jesus Christ demonstrates the basic difference between human and divine being. The self-witness of God in the revelation of Jesus Christ is the reality within which the difference between human and divine is articulated, within which God shows himself to be God and humanity is given the freedom to be humanity. Bonhoeffer’s theological description coheres nicely with Heidegger’s phenomenological methodology to the extent that being (or Bonhoeffer’s God revealed in Jesus Christ) is not considered to be derived from an investigation of entities or beings, nor from a general description of being, but articulates itself in the way it shows itself to be (Marsh 1994:119). This agreement is embedded within the framework of the ‘revelation of God through Jesus Christ’ – the God-man that becomes the heart of Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Act and Being*.

faith that “God is the divine subject self-witnessed [revelation] as Christ becoming present in community” (see Marsh 1992a:271). Bonhoeffer adds that “the community of faith is God’s final revelation as ‘Christ existing as a community’ and here Christ has come in the closest proximity to humanity” (see DBWE 2:112). Bonhoeffer finds a correlation here: if Christ exists as a community, then revelation happens in the community of faith (see DBWE 2:113).

Several authors have offered explanations on how to interpret, read, and analyse *Act and Being*.

Charles Marsh, a renowned Bonhoeffer scholar, affirms:

In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer’s most demanding academic work, Christology is put in the conversation of the transcendental tradition in order to show that revelation as community surpasses any analytical reduction to idealist-transcendental epistemologies [and Bonhoeffer’s usage] of the Hegelian tradition is re-described by the idea of Jesus ‘Christ exists as community’ (Marsh 1994:99).

For Marsh, Bonhoeffer’s purpose in *Act and Being* “is to celebrate the turning of the self-outward in the community who in Christ is released from the absolute solitariness of death” (see Marsh 1994:132). Since “Christ exists as community, it provides the space wherein one move from death to the gladness of dying in Christ – and hence being given new life” in the community of faith (see Marsh 1999:133).

By contrast, Clifford Green suggests an alternative way of interpreting, reading, and analysing *Act and Being*. He proposes that the treatise is best understood as a continuation of Bonhoeffer’s theology found in *Sanctorum Communio*. First, Green (1999:102) suggests that “all the major concepts minted in the first work [*Sanctorum Communio*] are taken over into the second” [*Act and Being*]. Second, a new emphasis appears in Bonhoeffer’s theology, viz., “the anthropology of *Sanctorum Communio* pointed toward the concern with human *being* in communities and the continuity and unity of the self which are explicit in *Act and Being*” (see Green 1999:102). This leads Green to the conclusion that “in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer clearly articulates the distinctive soteriological problem in his theological anthropology to which he returns again and again in other texts.” Green (1999:103) stresses that “the articulation of this soteriological problem is the most significant new element which appears when *Act and Being* is compared with *Sanctorum Communio* ... we can see it is adumbrated in the first book”.

These two positions on Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being* raise some further questions: Does he argue for some philosophical or theological system of thought or a central theme, namely, Jesus 'Christ exists as a community'? Subsequently, does he say that Jesus Christ is God's final revelation of himself and that this revelation should be thought of within the concreteness of the church? These are questions that have to be addressed to understand Bonhoeffer's interpretation of revelation. As DeJonge suggests,

The question of the proper concept of revelation stands at the heart of Bonhoeffer's problem of act and being. Philosophy cannot solve the problem of act and being ... because they think with inadequate concepts of revelation (DeJonge 2009:9, 17).

The discussion thus far raises several questions as to which approach should be used to interpret, read, and analyse *Act and Being*. I propose that one may identify several correlations⁴¹ in terms of concepts found in both *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*.

First, the idea of God's final revelation existing as the church community is found in both *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*; and in both instances, revelation is seen as a community; namely, Jesus 'Christ exists as a community. Subsequently, one could, therefore, argue that Bonhoeffer's view on how the church should perceive that the 'being' of revelation as found in *Act and Being* (see DBWE 2:125-127) was also already explored in *Sanctorum Communio* (see DBWE 1: 127,134). If in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer is expanding the idea, 'Christ exists as a community,' as found in *Sanctorum Communio*, as I propose. One might presuppose that *Act and Being*'s Christology is interrelated to that of *Sanctorum Communio*. Since in *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer set out to give a Christological description of the community in terms of 'Christ exists as a community'; and in *Act and Being* here-described the idea of 'Christ exists as a community' by developing it in Christological terms. Marsh explains:

In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer pursues the meaning of community in less personalistic, more developed Christological ontological terms. Bonhoeffer continues to sharpen his critique [on Hegel's view on community] in his habilitation work *Act and Being* (1930) by thinking of the meaning of community in rigorously Christological terms; 'Christ existing as community' ('*Christus als Gemeinde existierend*') becomes his revision of Hegel's axiom 'God existing as community' ('*Gott als Gemeinde existierend*') (Marsh

⁴¹ In this chapter I will continually make reference to correlations found between *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*.

1992b: 428,439).

Although this is plausible, I have to concede that Bonhoeffer mentions the idea ‘Christ exists as a community’ only sporadically in *Act and Being*. For that reason, I propose that although there is a definite correlation between *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, the latter adopts an entirely different logic. The idea, ‘being of revelation’ is defined in *Act and Being* as “the being of the person of Christ [existing] in the community of persons of the church” as the community (see DBWE 2:125). In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer is engaging philosophy, that is, the being of revelation from a theological viewpoint, as opposed to appealing to social philosophy and anthropology from a religious perspective in *Sanctorum Communio*. The editors to the Afterword of *Act and Being* suggest:

In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer is preoccupied by the attempt through criticism and logical argumentation not to provide for, but certainly point to, revelation in the medium of the philosophical concept ... [in fact] he declared that the relation between philosophy and theology requires a new clarification (DBWE 2:178-179).

Marsh assents that Bonhoeffer’s “analysis [in *Act and Being*] requires greater precision in distinguishing the theological from the philosophical in formulations of the idea of God’s existing as community” (see Marsh 1992b:439).

Act and Being adopts a different logic compared to *Sanctorum Communio*; For instance, there are fewer Christological references in *Act and Being*. To describe Bonhoeffer’s Christology as found in *Act and Being*, I will discuss all the main chapters from Part A to Part C sequentially. The selections will be related to Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Act and Being*, particularly on how he approaches the concepts of ‘act’ and ‘being’ to the theology of transcendence and consciousness. I will discuss his Christology with specific reference to how the phrase ‘two natures’ of Christ is brought into ‘being’ in *Act and Being*.

On this basis, Chapter Five will be structured in the following way: In the next section, I will explain the argument of *Act and Being* as necessary background to Bonhoeffer’s Christology. In the third section, I will discuss two specific concepts of revelation in relation to Bonhoeffer’s Christology, as found in *Act and Being*, viz., ‘the community of revelation’ and ‘Christ exists as (the) community.’ The fourth section will offer an exposition to what Bonhoeffer is saying about the ‘two natures’ of Christ in *Act and Being*. This means that I will go through the text

systematically from Part A through Part C and try to uncover what Bonhoeffer infers or holds indirectly in *Act and Being* about the ‘two natures’ of Christ. I will do so by exploring the concepts of the ‘community of revelation’ and ‘Christ exists as a community.’ The last section serves as a conclusion.

Significantly, not much is said overtly regarding the nature of Christ’s ‘being,’ whether divine or human, in *Act and Being*. However, one can make deductions through the basis of certain expressions in the text. Bonhoeffer often states that the phrase ‘the being of revelation’ is interrelated to the being of the person (humanity) of Christ in a community of persons. Typically, one can garner such a conclusion from the many references to ‘revelation’ in the text; and how Bonhoeffer expresses God’s ‘being’ as Christ’s revelation in the church community suggests that he sees Christ’s ‘being’ as interrelated to ‘revelation.’ I will argue that the reality of ‘revelation’ of how God chose to reveal Godself through Christ in the church community constitutes Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Act and Being*. As Charles Marsh suggests,

In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer conceives of Christology as the task of illuminating the Christ-reality which at once precedes difference and instantiates difference through the unity of Christ’s being in community thus expanding the idea of ‘Christ exists as community’ (Marsh 1992b:439).

5.2 The argument of *Act and Being*

In this section, I will explain the reasoning of *Act and Being* as providing the necessary background to Bonhoeffer’s Christology. Fundamental to understanding the argument of *Act and Being* one has to explore Bonhoeffer’s analysis of the concepts idealism and transcendental philosophy in relation to Dasein.⁴² These concepts are also related to Bonhoeffer’s understanding of Hegel’s idealist inheritance and his knowledge of the Kantian legacy of transcendental philosophy. Bonhoeffer starts developing his understanding of these concepts early in *Act and Being* and then further develops the concepts and their relation to Dasein throughout the book.

For Bonhoeffer, from an idealist perspective, revelation is seen as an experience of consciousness in contrast to it being seen as a religious experience. Typically, idealism would

⁴² Dasein is the mode of being of human beings as distinct from other existing things.

express God as a God of our consciousness. By comparison, Bonhoeffer maintains that “God is not a God of our consciousness – to make God the content of our consciousness means to understand God as an entity” (see DBWE 2:92). Bonhoeffer understood that “God ‘is’ not in the sense that an objective entity is” but rather “God is in God-Understanding-God’s-self in human beings in the act of faith and revelation” (see DBWE 2:93). Additionally, he stresses that “idealism deprives self-understanding of being of its transcendental orientation” (see DBWE 2:40) or “‘being’ is being amidst transcendence ... to know oneself to be orientated towards transcendence” (see DBWE 2:44). Later in a 1931 essay, *Concerning the Christian Idea of God*, Bonhoeffer argues that,

Idealism cannot conceive of God as the absolutely free personality [who] is therefore absolutely transcendent, and yet who revealed God’s self in ‘oneness’ ... in a historical fact [Jesus of Nazareth] in a historical personality (DBWE 2:16).

For Bonhoeffer, instead of idealism, what is needed is a form of theological thinking that “God himself dies and reveals [the divine self] in the death of a man who is condemned as a sinner” (see DBWE 2:17).

In his analysis of transcendental philosophy, contrary to Hegel’s idealist inheritance, Bonhoeffer asserts that,

One has to deal with the problem of transcendental philosophy quite differently – transcendentalism [is about a] God [who] recedes into the nonobjective, into what is beyond disposition, therefore thinking within boundaries (DBWE 2:85).

Bonhoeffer claims that “transcendental philosophy regards thinking to be ‘in reference to’ transcendence” (see DBWE 2:60). Therefore, for Bonhoeffer, the point of departure in Kant’s transcendental philosophy is Kant’s idea of God’s transcendence. This implies that Kant’s transcendental dialectic was conceived in the concept of reason. For Bonhoeffer, the flaw was Kant assumed the idea of God is prompted by motive; God, therefore, is the idea of the total of all possibilities.

In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer identifies the flaws found in idealist and philosophical approaches by making the critical claim that a Christian can only confront and influence the present culture through ‘Christ existing as a community’ in the church. This concept ‘Christ exists as a community in the church’ then becomes fundamental for understanding the

argument of *Act and Being*.

‘Christ exists as a community,’ is a concept that was developed in Bonhoeffer’s *Sanctorum Communio*⁴³ in relation to Christology and fleshed out in *Act and Being*. I maintain that this conjecture is not entirely accurate since one can particularly note that in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer sets out to present the concept of ‘Christ exists as a community’ as parallel to Christian revelation. He insists that

...the Christian revelation must not be interpreted as ‘having happened’ ... Christian revelation must occur in the present precisely because it is, in the qualified once-and-for-all occurrence of the cross and resurrection of Christ ... in other words, be thought in the church, for the church is the present Christ, ‘Christ existing as community’ (DBWE 2:111).

It will be inappropriate for me to examine only the concept ‘Christ exists as a community’ in relation to his Christology because the text of *Act and Being* presents itself with various other ideas on revelation. This makes it nearly impossible to piece together a coherent argument in support of a Christology based only on the concept ‘Christ exists as a community.’

There is much conjecture that Bonhoeffer’s *Act and Being* is the outworking of ideas and concepts he first developed in *Sanctorum Communio*, particularly his Christology. Scholars speculate that examining *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* in conjunction will allow us to piece together a coherent Christological theology, one which Bonhoeffer then developed further in his later writings. If this is plausible, then this has to be done accurately. Because if any hint is found in *Act and Being* that suggests that *Act and Being* is a reworking of Bonhoeffer’s theology found in *Sanctorum Communio*, then this task to piece together the two in a coherent way would become challenging.

I consider it is necessary to point out at least two distinct differences between these two texts. First, in *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer calls for the concreteness of God in Christ, whereas in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer criticises Barth’s dualism and calls for the free contingency of God. Second, pertinent issues in *Sanctorum Communio* are related to the concrete nature of the body of Christ in the church as a sociological unit. In contrast, in *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer

⁴³ DBWE 2:111 [43]: in what follows, Bonhoeffer sums up the basic ideas he has developed in *Sanctorum Communio*.

asks questions on how to combine the earthly continuity of revelation with its free contingency in the church. In this study, I propose that *Act and Being* is not a coherent outworking of *Sanctorum Communio*. However, in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer deals more specifically with the proper expression of God's self-revelation, that is, the problem of revelation and what philosophical modes should be used to express God's revelation.

Conversely, I propose that since the idea of the 'being' of revelation can solely be traced in *Act and Being*, it becomes fundamental to understanding the argument of the book. Bonhoeffer's case is always related to the idea of the 'being' of revelation. Also, I propose that the concept of the 'being' of revelation is related to Bonhoeffer's concern for the assimilation found in the church in its social-basic relations (social experiences), grounded in the reality of revelation (God's revelation). Therefore, he merges theology with sociology; sociology is related to theology. Bonhoeffer argues that the 'being' of revelation should be understood only within the context of the social relations of the church. This idea is related to the church's social experiences that are grounded in the reality of revelation.

I hold that Bonhoeffer's argument for the 'being' of revelation, as a locus of interpretation, in *Act and Being* provides a distinct perspective on his thought on 'revelation.' Bonhoeffer conceded conceptually that the idea of 'revelation' has to be understood within the context of 'being.' He insists that,

... a genuine interpretation of the being of revelation also demands, namely the knowledge that the existence of human beings is always already 'being in ...'. This 'being in ...' requires two critical qualifications: (1) The existence of human beings must be affected; and (2) it must be possible to think of being continuity. If we add that the reality of revelation is just the sort of existing being which constitutes the being (the existence) of human beings—but that this being [dies Sien] is the triune divine person—our picture is complete, provided that this is understood as 'being in Christ,' that is to say, 'being in the church' (DBWE 2:108).

Subsequently, these ideas 'being in Christ' and 'being in the church' can be recognised in Bonhoeffer's view of 'revelation,' as 'Christ exists as community'. There is no other locus by which one may rightly understand God's revelation, but His revelation in the church as 'Christ exists as a community.'

Bonhoeffer argues against a philosophical understanding of revelation, instead asserting that

revelation is only solved in Christ, in the church, the contingent revelation of God in Christ.

Bonhoeffer asserts:

The concept of a contingent revelation of God in Christ denies in principle the possibility of the self-understanding of the I apart from the reference to revelation (Christian transcendentalism). The concept of revelation must, therefore, yield an epistemology of its own ... the concept of revelation has to be thought about within the concreteness of the conception of the church, that is to say, in terms of sociological category in which the interpretation of act and of being meet and are drawn together in one (see DBWE 2:31).

Here Bonhoeffer adopts a particular message and purpose not solely in conjunction with *Sanctorum Communio*; but about his “brash attempt to push the transcendental tradition to give room, as far as it can, for God’s revelation” (see DBWE 2:19). In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer places a strong emphasis on a proper understanding of revelation; one cannot conceive of the church without an appropriate knowledge of revelation. This position may be contrasted with that of other Bonhoeffer scholars.

Phillips posits that the idea of ‘the revelation’ in the church as the ‘community of revelation’ expressed in *Act and Being* is developed as early as in *Sanctorum Communio*. Phillips proposes that,

The sequence of Bonhoeffer’s first two major works is reversed. While *Sanctorum Communio* developed the forms and structure of the community of revelation, *Act and Being* is concerned with the preliminary thesis: A Christian conception of revelation must, by definition, be an ecclesiological statement. Thus many of the tensions and concerns within and behind the argument of *Sanctorum Communio* (especially the Christological ones) first became clear in *Act and Being* (Phillips 1964:57).

Also, Phillips suggests that in both works, Bonhoeffer accepts Karl Barth’s dialectical theology and Barth’s theology of revelation that will emerge in most of his later writings. Nevertheless, it is in these early writings, that Bonhoeffer identifies the shortcomings of the dialectical method. The corrective was the thesis formulated in *Sanctorum Communio* and carried into the pages of *Act and Being*: “the church is the ‘community of revelation’; and ‘Christ exists as the church’” (see Phillips 1967:68).

DeJonge speculates that examining *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* in conjunction will allow us to piece together a coherent Christological theology. DeJonge, a Bonhoeffer scholar who writes on *Act and Being*, suggests that *Sanctorum Communio* proves valuable in

establishing an educational background to the writing of *Act and Being*. DeJonge postulates that in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer relies on the ecclesio-sociological categories developed in *Sanctorum Communio* to explain how the aspect of revelation remains in the church as a community (see DeJonge 2012:129).

Most Bonhoeffer scholars presume a continuity in *Act and Being* and *Sanctorum Communio*, concluding that the ideas expressed in *Sanctorum Communio* are developed further in *Act and Being*, and suggesting that the two books are inextricably linked.

To follow Bonhoeffer's logic in *Act and Being*, I will focus on the primary purpose of this chapter, viz., to support the primary texts Part A through Part C sequentially. I will tease out specific Christological texts in relation to Bonhoeffer's understanding of the 'two natures' of Christ, instead of trying to establish continuity between *Act and Being* and *Sanctorum Communio*.

Bonhoeffer in *Act and Being* reacts against Karl Barth's theology; he levels an accusation of prominent disparity, in a critical address against Barth's theology. Thus *Act and Being* reveal Bonhoeffer's reaction to Barth's dialectical theology. It is for this reason that *Act and Being* often present itself as a critical address directed against Barth, mainly with Bonhoeffer's critical questions regarding Barth's dialectical theology. Bonhoeffer contests Barth's theology of revelation by saying: "It is not as if [the] dialectical theology [of Barth] had, after all, discovered a 'systematic' formula for a theology of revelation" (see DBWE 2:86). It is against the ideas and questions and defence directed against Barth's theology that Bonhoeffer unfolds his Christology in *Act and Being*.

In contrast to Barth's interpretation of revelation, Bonhoeffer presents different philosophical and theological solutions to the problem of revelation. First, Bonhoeffer presents us with Barth's actualistic understanding of 'the freedom and contingency of God in revelation,' the 'event' of revelation in which humans encounter God, that in Barth's estimation is God's 'event.' Bonhoeffer claims that Barth's interpretation of revelation is presented as temporary and cannot be contained by humans; therefore, our relationship with God is considered an

‘event.’ Subsequently, Bonhoeffer’s response to Barth’s interpretation of revelation is this: revelation is about the freedom of God “in that God freely chose to be bound to historical human beings ... God is free not from human beings but for them. Christ is the word of God’s freedom” (see DBWE 2:90). In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer’s idea of revelation, as distinct from Barth’s, is expressed with different terms: God is ‘haveable’; God ‘comes out of God’s self in revelation’; and ‘Christ is the word of God’s freedom’ (DBWE 2:91).

Although Bonhoeffer and Barth are distinct in thought, Charles Marsh suggests that we consider Bonhoeffer’s theology and Christology in *Act and Being* as being shaped by Barth’s theology. Marsh proposes that,

Bonhoeffer wished to preserve the continuities in Barth’s theology [in particular] with the problem of divine and human continuities [that] provided Bonhoeffer with the theological framework within which to think these continuities in reference to their Christological coherence (Marsh 1994: viii).

To understand the argument of *Act and Being*, I have to determine Bonhoeffer’s pattern of unfolding and defending his understanding of God’s revelation. I am also left to unearth his transcendental or ontological theologies as related to his Christology. In the next section, I will explore the Christological aspects considering the concept of ‘community of revelation,’ and the idea of ‘Christ exists as a community.’ I intend to determine how these concepts are related to the theology of revelation, specifically the revelation of God through Christ. The question remains whether this concept ‘Christ exists as a community,’ to be exact the ‘community as revelation’ (the revelation of God through Christ), operates as the foundation of Bonhoeffer’s theological thought in *Act and Being* on the ‘two natures’ of Christ.

5.3 Bonhoeffer’s concept of the ‘community of revelation,’ and ‘Christ exists as a community’ – with relation to his Christology in *Act and Being*

This section of the study concentrates on two specific concepts of revelation arising from Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Act and Being*, viz., ‘the community of revelation’ and ‘Christ exists as a community.’ These concepts will not be discussed in a particular order nor sequentially but instead placed in their relationship to his Christology. I will take specific note of varying expressions related to these concepts that signify their association with the church

community. Part B of Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being* deals extensively with the problem of revelation and the church community as the champion for the solution to this problem. In this section, I limit myself to Christological texts on revelation relevant to this study.

As a starting point to understanding revelation in *Act and Being*, we note Bonhoeffer's approach toward revelation.

[For Bonhoeffer] the entire situation [of God's freedom] raises the question whether the formalistic-actualistic understanding of the freedom and contingency of God in revelation is to be made the foundation of theological thought. In revelation it is not so much a question of the freedom of God – eternally remaining within the divine self, aseity – on the other side of revelation, as it is of God's coming out of God's own self in revelation...It is a question of the freedom of God (DBWE 2:90).

The above quotation reveals Bonhoeffer's insight on how to express the idea that God is 'haveable', or God is 'graspable in the Word within the church'; or that God is in the 'community of revelation.' These varying expressions related to revelation all signify their association to the church community (see DBWE 2:91).

In a nutshell, the church community becomes the 'community of revelation' precisely because, in the first place, revelation is based on God's freedom in revelation. It needs to be understood as God's "being free not from human beings but for them" (see DBWE 2:90). Besides, Bonhoeffer's idea of revelation can also be understood as a mode of implying that Christ became the word of God's freedom. Christ acted as the divine-human who became the authentic disclosure of how God chose to present himself in this world before humans as both divine and human in the church, the 'community of revelation.' Therefore, Bonhoeffer declares: God is 'haveable,' God is 'graspable in the Word within the church,' and God is in the 'community of revelation.' These expressions are all interrelated: "God freely chose to be bound to historical human beings and to be placed at the disposal of human beings" (see DBWE 2:90).

To put it quite provisionally, one can deduce that Bonhoeffer's reference to 'haveable' (graspable in the Word within the church) in *Act and Being* is his way of explaining implicitly that God's revelation as the divine-human. The incarnate Christ is verified in God's Word and authenticated in the church as the 'community of revelation.'

Regarding the 'human' and 'haveable' expressions of Christ Phillips posit:

Such a picture of the incarnation became as basic to Bonhoeffer's doctrine of revelation as it became foreign to Barth's. For Bonhoeffer the doctrine of revelation is Christology; Christology is based upon God's availability [as the divine-human] (Phillips 1967:162).

Interestingly, these expressions in *Act and Being*, 'God is haveable,' 'graspable in the Word within the church,' and 'God is present [in the world]' are clear indications of Bonhoeffer's usage of Hegel's theology of revelation (see DBWE 2:90). Very likely, Hegel's theology impacted Bonhoeffer's theology and his ideas on the 'revelation of God.'

In recent years there has been considerable interest in Bonhoeffer's engagement with Hegel's theology of revelation. Charles Marsh was among the first Bonhoeffer scholars to analyse Hegel's influence on Bonhoeffer's view of revelation.⁴⁴ Marsh's assumptions seem to be realistic and well-founded, as laid out in his book *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (1994). The approach I use below is derived from the explanation and proposal of Marsh, which I use to support my conclusions on the concept of divine embodiment, viz., on how Bonhoeffer understood the human and the divine natures of Christ.

In his book, Marsh discusses Bonhoeffer's engagement with Hegel's theology of revelation at length and more precisely, Hegel's influence on Bonhoeffer's view of revelation. Marsh postulates that Bonhoeffer's engagement with Hegel's theology on revelation impacted Bonhoeffer's theology and his views on revelation; about the God who is both 'haveable' and 'present' in the church.' In discussing Bonhoeffer's conversation with Hegel's ideas on the 'revelation of God' Marsh suggests that Bonhoeffer's idea also becomes synonymous to two of Hegel's ideas. Chiefly, God's availability as the divine-human and humanity's self-divinisation (a type of incarnational theology or deification) (see Marsh 1994:92-93).

In discussing Hegel's first idea, viz. God's availability as the divine-human in relation to how Bonhoeffer understood the 'revelation of God' Marsh suggests:

Bonhoeffer's conversation with Hegel is focused largely on the meaning of the embodiment of God. Like Hegel, Bonhoeffer places great weight on God's becoming

⁴⁴ Marsh writes prolifically on *Act and Being* in his PhD dissertation on the 'Philosophy and Community in the Early Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer' and on the 'Human Community and Divine Presence: Bonhoeffer's Theological Critique of Hegel' published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1992).

human [revelation] as the decisive event in history (Marsh 1994:102). For Marsh (1994:102), “Hegel’s references to the embodiment of God are ahistorical in tenor”. Marsh suggests that Hegel could not employ biblical Johannine language and speak of God sending His Son as the revelation of God, as the incarnate One. Conversely, Bonhoeffer could do so, and he speaks of the incarnate One whom Marsh implies “played an integral part of the persona Christi.” Marsh emphasises that,

Bonhoeffer insists the embodiment of Christ in the flesh punctuates this historical event with a significance that must not be overlooked. Therefore, for Bonhoeffer the embodiment of God is an event which transforms the total structures of the world ... nonetheless, what distinguishes Bonhoeffer’s description from Hegel’s is not so much the emphasis on divine embodiment but his sweeping, uncompromising christocentricism (Marsh 1994:102, 103).

In the same way, as above, Marsh discusses Hegel’s other idea related to the ‘revelation of God’, to be exact, on humanity’s self-divinisation (a type of incarnational theology of deification). Marsh believes that Bonhoeffer framed this discussion on deification to his understanding of the ‘revelation of God’ and humanity’s encounter with the divine ‘I.’ In doing the aforementioned, Marsh maintains that Bonhoeffer often points out noticeable differences that exist between the divine (theological) ‘I’ and the human ‘I’ about God’s self-revelation. Marsh suggests that,

... only if God is subject of the knowing of revelation and is thereby understood as the divine ‘I’ who at once stands against and embraces the human ‘I’ in the prevenience of his knowing ... in the act of being encountered by the other ‘I’, I am shaken up and awakened from the dream of self-constitution (Marsh 1994:100,69).

Marsh (1994:93) maintains that regarding community, “Bonhoeffer believed that Christ precedes both the ‘I’ and the other as their source and mediation, engendering a new relation” based on the revelation of God. Bonhoeffer warns that the concept of a contingent revelation of God in Christ denies in principle the possibility of the self-understanding of the ‘I’ apart from the reference to revelation (Christian transcendentalism) (see DBWE 1:31).

This kind of transcendental apperception⁴⁵ – the uniting of the possibility of self-understanding out of inner experiences with no object concept of God (that is self-consciousness) –

⁴⁵ Transcendental apperception is a Kantian expression in philosophy that Kant thought made experience possible by uniting and building coherent consciousness out of different experiences. Typically, this idea of transcendental apperception presents mankind with the possibility of the self-understanding of the ‘I’ apart from reference to God and God’s revelation.

Bonhoeffer assesses critically; because it has an illusion of self-divinisation (deification). Marsh suggests that Bonhoeffer refused to adopt Hegel's idea of humanity's self-divinisation that authenticates Hegel's type of incarnational theology (see Marsh 194:97). Marsh proposes that Hegel and Bonhoeffer assumed opposing views on the incarnation, which he explains in the following way:

For both Bonhoeffer and Hegel, the event [of the embodiment of God] witnesses to the good news that the infinite and the finite are inseparably connected. But Hegel takes [his type of incarnational theology] one step further – Humanity bears within itself the *divine idea*, not bearing it within itself like something from somewhere else but as its own substantial nature. Bonhoeffer refuses to concede the move, which he thinks incommodes a theology grounded in the priority of God's own self-grounding. In Bonhoeffer's view, God draws near to us and is with us in human togetherness, thereto the embodiment of God remains as Christ's real presence (Marsh 1994:96f).

Based on Marsh's explanation above, one can postulate that Bonhoeffer is in contention with Hegel's concept of divine embodiment. Bonhoeffer argues that the precise point of humanity's self-divinisation is that the possibility of the self-understanding (transcendental apperception) cannot be implied for the reason that Christ in his humanity was divine. This is so because Christ did not have to declare himself divine. He is divine. Christ precedes both the 'I' and the other. Therefore, suspicion arose for Bonhoeffer when Hegel attempted to overcome the difference between God and humanity by making humanity itself divine. Bonhoeffer strongly opposed this view of deification. Marsh explains:

Hegel's [position was not] primarily to emphasize God's gracious promise but to elevate humanity to God. [Thus] Hegel's most critical theological problem was his tendency to deify humanity. Hegel's God reaches out to humanity out of a fierce longing for his other, and in this meeting humanity becomes itself divine (Marsh 1994:97).

Bonhoeffer strongly opposed Hegel's view on the deification of humanity. He did not hold the belief that God reached out to humans because God had an intense longing for his other, and to satisfy this longing, God met humanity, which then became itself divine. However, Bonhoeffer stresses that the embodiment of God through His revelation of Christ is where God reached out to humans and met humanity; this then furtively remains God's real presence in the world. The embodiment of God for humanity in the church remains the place where God exists in the form of Christ as a community and where Christ's real presence exists in both his divine and the human form. To be exact, Marsh stresses that "God is the divine subject self-

witnessed in the presence of Christ as community” (see Marsh 1994:127).

Thus far, I noticed that Bonhoeffer’s line of reasoning is perspicacious, particularly in the way he constructs his concept of revelation. From here on, I will discuss Bonhoeffer’s idea of revelation in relation to epistemology; that is, epistemology is God’s revelation through Christ in the community. For Bonhoeffer, revelation is about knowledge, to know Christ is to find oneself in Christ in community, to be exact; it is within the community where God’s revelation (real presence) continues to exist. The church is the community of revelation.

Regarding the above construct, that revelation is about knowledge Floyd (1999:76) observes that:

In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer was exploring the moral nature of the progress of knowledge itself, a matter of power and control over the possibility of authentic otherness. For this reason, ‘the concept of revelation’, Bonhoeffer wrote ‘must yield an epistemology of its own’ (see DBWE 2: 87,120).

By tying revelation to epistemology, Bonhoeffer’s starting point in terms of the theory of knowledge provided him with a solid theological foundation to promote his theology of revelation (namely, ‘Christ exists as a community’). How we know what we know about God’s revelation, Bonhoeffer expresses, as God revealed in the ‘community of revelation,’ through the knowledge of Christ; therefore, ‘Christ exists as a community.’

It follows then that the church exists as a ‘community of revelation’ because it is within the church (the ‘community of revelation’) that the embodiment of God in the form of the divine-human is understood correctly and appropriated. In *Act and Being* this expression, that the church exists as a ‘community of revelation,’ becomes Bonhoeffer’s Christological foundation. To be exact; revelation has to be thought about only within the concept of the ‘community of revelation’ (the church community), which Bonhoeffer explains the following way:

That inasmuch as an interpretation of revelation in terms of act or in terms of being yields [an epistemology] concepts of understanding that are incapable of bearing the whole weight of revelation, the concept of revelation has to be thought about within the concreteness of the conception of the church, that is to say, in terms of a sociological category in which the interpretation of act and of being meet and are drawn together into one. The dialectic of *Act and Being* is understood theologically as the dialectic of faith and the congregation of Christ. Neither is to be thought without the other; each is ‘taken up’ or ‘suspended’ [*aufgehoben*] in the other (DBWE 2:31).

It is precisely here, “within the concreteness of the conception of the church” and in “the dialectic of faith and [in] the congregation of Christ,” that the community of revelation, the church, experiences the embodiment of God, through Christ’s divinity and humanity (see DBWE 2:31). In sum, for Bonhoeffer in *Act and Being* revelation (more so the community of revelation) within the concreteness of the church of Christ remains Bonhoeffer’s starting point to formulate a Christological foundation in *Act and Being*. It is here within the congregation of Christ that Christ is experienced and continues to exist as both human and divine.

Kelly contends that this Christological foundation and the dialectic of act and being are “recognisable in theological terms as the dialectic of faith and the community of Christ” (see Kelly 1990:67). Kelly explains that Bonhoeffer’s stated aim, the dialectic of faith and the community of Christ is misleading; “because of its subjective matter, that ranges into all the principal concepts dealt with in systematic theology under the approach of either ‘act’ categories of thought, or ‘being’ categories” (see Kelly 1990:67). For Kelly, this then presents us with three specific problems:

The epistemological problem with its dialectic swinging either to transcendental or ontological understanding of human existence, the revelation problem with its solution in church, and the anthropological problem with its solution as a ‘being in Christ’ and not ‘being in Adam’ (Kelly 1990:67).

If Kelly’s apprehensions and propositions are correct that in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer is simply picking “apart the philosophical presuppositions behind the way people [in this instance Heidegger] have coped with the reality of revelation” (Kelly 1990:67). I would like to use Kelly’s presupposition and present a case for how Bonhoeffer appropriates Heidegger’s ideas on revelation in relation to ‘being’ in *Act and Being*. I propose that this appropriation of Heidegger was prompted by Bonhoeffer’s intense engagement with Hegel’s theology on revelation. Hegel’s theology not only impacted Bonhoeffer’s views on revelation but also served as a beneficial sounding board to appraise Heidegger’s views on the revelation of ‘being’; and, in turn, developed into the formulation of his theology on revelation.

Secondary scholarship offers several interpretations of Bonhoeffer’s engagement with Heidegger in *Act and Being*. This engagement with Heidegger can be understood in a varied

number of ways. To begin with, *Act and Being* is simply a theological response to Heidegger's phenomenology of being. This is a discussion on the main philosophy relating to 'act' that has to do with transcendentalism and idealism. Notwithstanding that, this discussion is mainly on the main philosophy relating to 'being' that concerns ontological phenomenology.

If it is assumed that what Bonhoeffer is after in *Act and Being* is an appropriation of Heidegger's ontological phenomenology, then we are forced to engage in a rather abstract conceptuality of philosophical theology relating to 'act' and 'being.' However, I will not do so in this section but rather discuss in detail Bonhoeffer's argument on the 'being' of revelation in contrast to Heidegger's understanding. To put this argument in perspective, I will briefly discuss Bonhoeffer's appropriation of Heidegger's ontology.

Scharlemann on discussing the authenticity and encounter of Bonhoeffer's appropriation of Heidegger's ontology proposes that,

Bonhoeffer's appropriation with ontological existentialism connected with Heidegger's ontology raised the question of the meaning of being (Scharlemann 1994:253).

Bonhoeffer was "more directly concerned with the relationship between the ontological and the theological" ... therefore Bonhoeffer's "stated purpose of his *Act and Being* was to work out a theological ontology different from the ontological ontology of Heidegger's *Being and Time*" (see Scharlemann 1994:253). Scharlemann continues to argue that central to the focus of *Act and Being* is the following:

Bonhoeffer appropriated ontology in the name of a theological ontology, that is, in the name of a reading of ontology done not in the light of the idea of being but in the light of the idea of God or, more exactly, in the light of the revelation of God (Scharlemann 1994:253f).

The idea of God's revelation in relation to being in the community, Scharlemann highlights, is for Bonhoeffer, "a knowledge that manifests itself in connection with, and in response to, the reality called revelation; it is made explicit in theology" (see Scharlemann 1994:256). In fact, "being in the *Gemeinde* is a mode of knowing the new reality of revelation; and the understanding connected with this knowledge is made explicit by interpreting the language; in which 'revelation is expressed, which is the central focus of *Act and Being*, a theological ontology of revelation" (see Scharlemann 1994:256).

Richardson who wrote prolifically on the relationship between Heidegger and Bonhoeffer's concepts of the revelation of 'being' points out that a prominent feature that emerged from Bonhoeffer's thoughts and Heidegger's understanding is this: that all of Bonhoeffer's views on the revelation of 'being' should be rethought in the light of Heidegger's ideas since,

This is the whole of Heidegger [since] here let us remark simply that [for Heidegger] Being in this experience is the Being of God, to be sure, but of God insofar as He reveals Himself ... the beings, therefore, whose Being Heidegger wanted to *legein* (make manifest) were *phainomena*, i.e., were beings only insofar as they appear. For Heidegger, beings *are* only to the extent that they are *revealed* (Richardson 1965: 88, 89).

Interestingly, Richardson also believed that it was under the influence of Edmund Husserl's teaching on the revelation that Heidegger's views on revelation changed drastically (after leaving seminary). Also, Richardson proposed that Husserl's teaching provided Heidegger with the experience to be engaged with the phenomenological method, which allowed him to reinterpret Greek words in relation to being. Heidegger later began to understand and teach Being as *alētheia*,⁴⁶ the process of revelation (see Richardson 1965:89). This aspect is crucial because it gives us some insight as to why Bonhoeffer reworked Heidegger's ontological views on the revelation of 'being' and presents us with a definite difference between their thinking.

In discussing Bonhoeffer's appropriation with Heidegger, Gregor proposes that *Act and Being* is an engagement in discussion with Heidegger about ontological structures. Gregor put forward that,

Heidegger suggested that formal indication can act as a methodological mediator between philosophy and theology, since it pertains to ontological structures ... but Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenges Heidegger on this point, since it proceeds with an ontological assumption that is highly problematic: namely, that an autonomous human being can place itself into the truth about its own being. Bonhoeffer contends that *Dasein* cannot place itself into the truth about Being in general, because theology's claims, which derive from revelation are ontological, rendering Heidegger's fundamental ontology subject to revision (Gregor 2007:185-186).

In accord, Phillips also held the opinion that in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer "confronts various

⁴⁶ For Heidegger it was not only Husserl, but also Aristotle, who confirmed philosophically at this time the experience of Being as a process of revelation. Heidegger's renewed study of the Aristotelian treatises resulted in the insight into *alētheuein* [verbal form of *alētheia*, truth] process of revelation and in the characterisation of truth as non-concealment, to which all self-revelation of beings pertains. In other words, for a being to be revealed as what it *is*, it must emerge from the state in which it was concealed, so that it thereby becomes unconcealed. The Being of such a being will be the process by which this non-concealment, or revelation, takes place (Richardson 1965).

philosophical and theological solutions to the problem of revelation which were prevalent in 1930” (see Phillips 1959:60). Phillips, as mentioned earlier, argues that Bonhoeffer “orders revelation into two categories, those based upon a transcendental thesis and those which emerge from an ontological foundation”; and Bonhoeffer “questions the validity of each group for a specifically Christian conception of revelation ... arguing that neither act nor being is a correct category by means of which Christian revelation may be discussed” (see Phillips 1959:60). Therefore, Phillips posits that,

Bonhoeffer [in *Act and Being*] presents his thesis that the idea of revelation must be re-envisioned within the concretion of the idea of the church i.e. in a sociological category – where both kinds of analysis encounter each other and are drawn together in one (Phillips 1959:61).

Consequently, I contend like Phillips that the theology of *Act and Being* focuses on the idea of the revelation of Christ in the Church. Marsh points out that,

For Bonhoeffer the question of God is not a search for that being among beings in the world that is the highest being. Rather it is the concrete presence of God in Christ that presents itself to Dasein (Marsh 1992a:267).

In sum, the discussion on Bonhoeffer’s appropriation with Heidegger led me to concede that Bonhoeffer validates his Christological foundation in *Act and Being* in the following ways. First, Christ exists as a congregation as the embodiment of God (i.e., the humanity of Christ). Second, for Bonhoeffer, the reality of revelation and participation in the reality of God’s revelation is qualified within the church, as Christ existing as a community, as a ‘being in Christ’ and not ‘being in Adam.’

This discussion on ‘the community of revelation’ and ‘Christ exists as a community’ provided us with considerable insight into Bonhoeffer’s Christology. I will now continue to examine Bonhoeffer’s Christology with his understanding of what ‘being’ in Christ and not ‘being’ in Adam implies. Bonhoeffer stresses that revelation “can be understood or interpreted in terms of concepts of ‘being’ wherever its essence is taken to be doctrine, for doctrine is continuous and accessible; it can be freely accepted or rejected” (DBWE 2:103). Bonhoeffer needs to understand and explain that when God is “bound within a doctrine of the divine nature, then God is to be found in that doctrine”; and God is “understandable and subject to classification within the human ‘system’” (DBWE 2:103). The most common doctrine that can be understood

in this way is the “doctrine of a gracious God, one who declares that wherever God and human beings come together, there must stand the cross’ which should be ‘entirely welcome to our human ‘system’” (DBWE 2:104). In sum, Bonhoeffer asserts, “it follows that wherever revelation is understood only as a doctrine, one comes short of the Christian idea of revelation, because God is tied down by an ontological concept of that kind” (DBWE 2:104). Christology is the point of convergence that always becomes the starting point for the revelation of God. In ontology, the quality of the being is beyond question, and “being is amendable to pure demonstration and is brought into pure givenness [being] through something that exists,” namely, God (see DBWE 2:106). Bonhoeffer concludes:

Thus, for a purely ontological interpretation of revelation, it is as false to define revelation purely as something that is, as it is to evaporate it into something that is not (DBWE 2:106).

Revelation is something that exists; it is an object of knowledge. Therefore, in arguing for a starting point to know, Bonhoeffer first establishes that “genuine ontology demands a concept and object of knowledge” [that is, revelation] (see DBWE 2:107). For Bonhoeffer, the knowledge of revelation, “whether understood transcendently or ontologically, does not lead to contact with the existence of human beings” (DBWE 2:107). Bonhoeffer argues that the knowledge of revelation makes contact with humans only when “the revelation is preached to us – of God in Christ, the divine triune person giving itself to us,” then indeed Christ would be the object of our knowing (see DBWE2:108).

Thus, for Bonhoeffer, Christ can be conceived in personal terms in the community of faith in which God reveals His divine self as a person in the church, as the person of Christ. The community of faith in God’s final revelation as ‘Christ exists as a community’ and this “community in question is visible concretely” (DBWE 2:112). The church is ‘Christ existing as a community,’ the ‘being of revelation.’ “‘Christ existing as a community’ has to be thought of in this concreteness”; the church must be thought of “as the actual Church,” as the church that is visibly concrete (see DBWE 2:115). It is in this concrete (actual visible) Church that the revelation of God was preached as the embodiment of God as both divine and human. Therefore, Christ exists as a congregation and as the ‘being’ of the revelation of God. In fact,

“God ‘is’ in the relation of persons, and being is God’s being person” (DBWE 2:115). It can be argued that Bonhoeffer adopted a purely ontological structure of the revelation of ‘being’ in *Act and Being* – about his interpretation of revelation. This position of Bonhoeffer is well-regarded by other Bonhoeffer scholars.

Ned O’ Gorman supports Bonhoeffer’s rhetorical discourse on ontology, as discussed above. Still, he further develops Bonhoeffer’s structure of ‘being’ judiciously by suggesting that Bonhoeffer developed a radical social ontology in *Act and Being*. Gorman maintains that:

... sociality is the essence of human being in Bonhoeffer’s ontological thought [and this becomes] the ground of being that is simultaneously transcendent and immanent ... Bonhoeffer’s ontology is grounded in theology and within the perspective of theology, Bonhoeffer asks about the immanent being of God in the world which is posited by the incarnation – the divine-man. From the perspective of philosophy, he sharply questions the status of the transcendental subject. In both cases, Bonhoeffer’s main interest is showing the priority of the divine Other, and derivatively of the human other, with respect to human being (Gorman 2005:230, 233).

Also, Marsh, in support of an ontological structure of the revelation of ‘being’ in *Act and Being*, suggests that Bonhoeffer emphasised that “ontological definitions are connected with God’s self-witness in Jesus Christ” (see Marsh 1994:93). It is the Christ who refashioned the ontological structure of the revelation of ‘being’ making Christ the ‘vital’ centre of all reality. Bonhoeffer supposed that the Christian community precedes both ‘I’ and the other, thereby engendering a new ontology. The relation that then exists between the ontological structure of the revelation of ‘being’ and the ‘vital’ centre of reality is founded on the coming of God into a worldly experience through Christ as both divine and human (see Marsh 1994:93).

It is at this juncture (on the discussion of ontology) in *Act and Being* that Bonhoeffer’s idea on the revelation of God converges with the message of the cross (Christology). The designs on the revelation of God culminate in the church, where Bonhoeffer understood the mode or medium of the revelation of God exists in Christ as divine and human. The church is the community of the revelation of the ‘Being’ of God where Christ lives as a community.

5.4 Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Act and Being* – The ‘two natures’ of Christ

This brings us to the fourth section in which I will confirm what Bonhoeffer is saying or implying about the ‘two natures’ of Christ in *Act and Being*. I will go through the text Parts A-

C systematically to uncover what Bonhoeffer infers or says indirectly about the ‘two natures’ of Christ. I will discuss the concepts of the ‘community of revelation,’ and of ‘Christ existing as a community’ to establish Bonhoeffer’s theology of the ‘two natures’ of Christ as found in *Act and Being*.

Bonhoeffer’s Christology in *Act and Being* is embedded and articulated within the context of the ‘being’ of revelation. I will argue that Bonhoeffer defines and articulates the mode of ‘being’ of revelation as Christ existing in the church through Christ’s ‘two natures’ – his humanity and his divinity. Although the idea, ‘Christ exists in the church’ through the ‘being’ of his revelation, will seem repetitive, it becomes necessary for my intention in this study to allow for Bonhoeffer’s ‘evolving’ views on the ‘two natures’ of Jesus Christ to speak for itself. I do so mainly to grasp how Bonhoeffer’s evolving views on the so-called ‘two natures’ of Christ should be understood in *Act and Being*.

A good starting point would be Bonhoeffer’s explanation in *Act and Being* on the character of revelation about the concept of church. Bonhoeffer’s answer is this:

Revelation is and should be thought of only in reference to the concept of church, where the church is understood to be constituted by the present proclamation of Christ’s death and resurrection – within, on the part of, and for the community of faith. The proclamation must be a ‘present’ one, first, because it is only in that the occurrence of revelation happens for the community of faith itself, and secondly, because this is the only way in which the contingent character of revelation – that is, it’s being ‘from outside’ – makes itself known (DBWE 2:110).

Garnering from the selection above, one can deduce that Bonhoeffer’s ideas on the ‘being’ of revelation, and the idea of ‘present proclamation,’⁴⁷ are both expressions relating to God’s incidences of making himself ‘haveable.’ As the divine and human God, as expressed through the idea of the ‘two natures’ of Christ, Christ is present in the church as both human and divine. This reality of God’s mode of the revelation of Christ’s real presence in the church consequently transposes the idea of God’s person, the divine-human, onto the church, as ‘Christ exists as a community.’ For Bonhoeffer, this is the contingent character of revelation –

⁴⁷ This idea of the ‘present proclamation of Christ’s death and resurrection’ is consistent with Bonhoeffer’s Christological expression ‘Christ vicarious representative action’ that he develops throughout his corpus.

revelation is and should be thought of only about the concept of the church (see DBWE 2:110).

Rainer Mayer, in framing and explaining the idea of the 'being' of revelation, the 'present proclamation' and 'presence of God within the church' suggests: Bonhoeffer's starting point for the development of this idea is transcendence and immanence (see Mayer 1981:185). Bonhoeffer uses these concepts to establish how God's mode of revelation was ultimately employed in the church – i.e., making God 'haveable' – as both divine and human in the community of faith. This idea of God's 'being' of revelation – the concept of God's Transcendence – is explained by Mayer in the following way:

According to Bonhoeffer, a valid concept of transcendence requires that human existence must be met (immanence). Moreover, such a concept requires that transcendence be conceived of in continuity as something encountered by man, as crisis and limitation, as something not at man's disposal and in principle free of being known by man (transcendence). In other words, we are to think of a kind of reality that neither treats revelation wholly as an entity nor volatilises revelation into nonentity. This reality must rather be thought of as enjoying a mode of being that embraces both entity and nonentity, while at the same time 'suspending' within itself man's awareness of its faith. According to Bonhoeffer, these conditions are met in 'revelation's mode of being within the church.' The Protestant concept of the church is to be understood as the concept of a person; that is to say, 'God reveals himself as a person in the church.' The Christian communion is God's final revelation – God as 'Christ exists as community.' Bonhoeffer identifies the reality of the church with the presence of Christ. The divine-human Christ embraces all whom he has obtained for his own (see Mayer 1981:185).

If Mayer's assertions are correct and Bonhoeffer's understanding is directly aligned to the Protestant concept of the 'church' and 'person,' that is, God's revelation as a person in the church is his final revelation. If correct, then Bonhoeffer's idea of the 'being' of revelation in *Act and Being* plays an essential role in Bonhoeffer's outworking of his Christology.

Bonhoeffer's idea of revelation's mode of 'being' within the church is the place where he identifies the reality of the 'person' in the church. The church is the place of the presence of Christ and the place where Christians enjoy communion with God in his final revelation (revelation's mode) as 'Christ existing in the community.' More so, for Bonhoeffer, revelation must occur in the present; all occurrences of the church must be thought of as 'Christ [presently] existing as a community.'

In addition to the idea of revelation's mode of 'being' the tacit truth for Bonhoeffer is that the

church should also be the present proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection. Bonhoeffer supposed the idea of the *vicarious representative action* of Christ should also be established within the context of revelation. Bonhoeffer expresses this idea in the following way:

Christian revelation must occur in the present precisely because it is, in the qualified once and for all occurrence of the cross and resurrection of Christ, always something 'of the future'. It must, in other words, be thought in the church, for the church is the present Christ, 'Christ exists as community' (DBWE 2:111).

I have thus far substantiated that Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Act and Being* is developed around God's 'being' of revelation as the revelation of Christ (real presence) in the church. All the incidences referred by Bonhoeffer as the 'being' of revelation leads one to the reality of God's revelation as the divine-human in the church as 'Christ exists as a community'. From this, one can deduce that for Bonhoeffer, God makes himself 'haveable' as the divine-human (divine and human) that in *Act and Being* then could become an expression of the 'two natures' of Christ who is present in the church.

Subsequently, for Bonhoeffer, not only should the church be established in the following ways. It must be set within the context of the 'being' of revelation; and become the proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection as indicated above, but the church should also be conceived of in the context of personal terms as the new humanity that assumes the form of a 'community of faith.'

As is typical within Protestantism, Bonhoeffer understood the church (the community of faith) as conceived in personal terms, to be exact, "God reveals the divine self in the church as person" through the person of Christ who exists both as divine and human in the community of faith (see DBWE 2:112). Bonhoeffer's idea of the community of faith then becomes the penultimate revelation of God as 'Christ existing as a community.' Because it is in the community "here [that], Christ has come in the closest proximity to humanity" (see DBWE 2:112). It is in the community that Christ has given his self to the new humanity. The person "draw[ing] together in itself all whom Christ has won, binding and committing Christ to them and them to one another," thus forming the community of faith (see DBWE 2:112) in person. Bonhoeffer asserts:

The church is the community of faith created by and founded upon Christ, in which Christ is revealed as the new human, or rather, as the new humanity itself' [in person] (DBWE 2:112).

Seen in the way, as explained above, the question of interpretation of 'the being of revelation' in *Act and Being* takes on an entirely new meaning. Bonhoeffer believed that God gave His divine self in Christ to the community of faith and every individual as a member of this community of faith. Subsequently, for Bonhoeffer, "the being of revelation 'is,' instead, the being of the community of persons that is constituted and formed by the person of Christ in which individuals already find themselves" (see DBWE 2:113). For Bonhoeffer in *Act and Being*, God's revelation always culminates in the 'being' of the community through the person of Christ.

The conclusions should be interpreted with caution, Bonhoeffer warns, because this does not mean that God has now ultimately revealed himself as though humans could know the complete God. However, for Bonhoeffer, God is in the self-understanding of humans in revelation, which means that God places Himself within reach of the 'I.' God's freedom in revelation is bound up in His right to give or to withhold His divine self; God is never at the disposal of human beings. God's revelation is an act of understanding himself in revelation.

In principle, – God's 'being' of revelation necessitates a place beyond Himself (not as if God dies).⁴⁸ God is in Himself, and therefore He is always with us in giving of Himself through Christ He is with us in community. Marsh assesses and explains Bonhoeffer's concepts of 'divine knowing' and 'God's revelation in Himself' by suggesting:

The subject of the act of the divine knowing is God Himself revealed in Jesus Christ; the originary location of this revelation is the story of Jesus of Nazareth narrated in the biblical texts; the perduring place wherein Jesus is present. Our knowledge of God is then bound up with whether God has known us in Christ. As such, the thought of divine

⁴⁸ Marsh explains in detail Hegel's point of view on the 'death of God' theory in the following way: "According to Hegel, Spirit animates the event of the God-man to become infinitely more than a historical moment, indeed to become 'the axis on which world history turns.' Spirit is the dynamic process by which the implicit unity of the divine and human natures is actualised. The divine being, says Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, is 'reconciled with its existence through an event, the event of God's emptying Himself of His Divine Being through His Factual Incarnation and His Death.' For this reason, the death of God must be regarded as the tremendous moment in which even death itself ceases to mean the nonexistence of this particular individual; for the dead God is resurrected 'into the universality of the Spirit, which lives in its own communion, dies there daily, and daily rises again.' Thus, the knowledge that lives in the 'yea, yea' of divine reconciliation does away with the separation between the self and that which it observes and to which it relates" (Marsh 1994: 85-86).

identity runs aground because it overlooks the personal structural character of community. Similarly, the thought of divine difference is inadequate because it misses the truth of the basic theological axiom that what it means for God to be *beisichselbst* [in Himself] is that he is always also *bei uns* [with us]. God knows humankind because Christ stands vicariously in its place, thus God's knowing humankind is God's knowing it in Christ. And for Bonhoeffer, God's knowing humankind in Christ is inseparable from God's knowing it in community (Marsh 1994:100).

In summary, the message of 'divine knowing' and God's revelation of Himself, as revealed in Jesus Christ in Bonhoeffer's assessment, becomes necessary for the community of Christ to hear, understand, and be drawn toward. The message of the 'divine knowing' is of God's ideas of Himself, as revealed in Jesus Christ, that points correctly to the human nature of Christ, the story of the 'person' Jesus of Nazareth. It is this story of the humanity of Christ that Bonhoeffer affirms, and which human beings are drawn when they hear it in the first instance, which he argues becomes the personal character of the community of faith, whose subject is Christ.

Bonhoeffer affirms:

Only through the person of Christ, can the existence of human beings be encountered, and as the person of Christ has been revealed in the community of faith, the existence of human beings can be encountered only through the community of faith. It is from the person of Christ that every other person first acquires for other human beings the character of personhood (DBWE 2:114).

It is within the framework of the 'divine knowing,' to be exact, 'God's knowing in Christ,' that Bonhoeffer transitions to the subject of Christ's 'personhood' and 'humanness' that is acquired by the community of faith through the 'being' of revelation – the revelation of the person of Christ.

The correlation that exists between the 'personhood' and 'humanness' of Christ may be explained in these two ways. First, the community of faith encounters Christ when the divine-human, the 'personhood' of Christ, is acquired. Second, Christ is experienced and becomes a reality in the community of faith when the community of Christ receives the immediate character of His 'humanness' or 'personhood.' Bonhoeffer stresses that this assimilation and encounter can only be experienced within a community where Christ exists as the divine-human.

Rainer Mayer explores this idea,⁴⁹ a prolific writer, and Bonhoeffer scholar who delves

⁴⁹ German Bonhoeffer scholar Rainer Mayer was one of the first to write about Bonhoeffer's concepts on the

particularly into Bonhoeffer's theology. In his essay, *Christology: The Genuine Form of Transcendence* Mayer confirms the idea as mentioned earlier by saying: "This concept of 'Christ exists as a community,' as a corporate person, makes it possible for Bonhoeffer to overcome individualism and to find true transcendence" (see Mayer 1981:186). Mayer maintains that:

... the corporate person of the community is not at my disposal. *This is the continuity and the 'beyond' of transcendence.* Rather, she is the absolute thou, challenging and limiting my I. *This is the ethical and social dimension of transcendence.* At the same time, I, as a Christian, am a member of this community and part of Christ. *This is the relationship of transcendence to existence and this world* (Mayer 1981:186).

Mayer (1981:186) resolves that "Bonhoeffer has posed the question of transcendence as a question of existence, that is, as a question concerning the being of a person, the being of the Christ person." Suppose Mayer is correct in his interpretation, then one can assume that the 'being' of Christ's person is Bonhoeffer's way of emphasizing both the human and divine nature of Christ.

If the above is accepted as accurate, then the question of transcendence as an issue of existence and as concerning the 'being' of the person Christ would pose further questions. First, it would raise whether the ideas on reality and the 'being' of person will come together. Second, it would raise the issue of the reality of Christ, who can reveal himself in the church as a real person. To solve these differentiations, an adequate explanation of how Bonhoeffer understood the origin of reality needs to be further explored.

Concerning God and the origin of the reality (to determine whether reality is essentially from God), Bonhoeffer emphasises that human beings need to be placed into a reality that proceeds from God. By implication the 'I' has to be "'called into reality' by the transcendent 'You'; then the 'I' is directed into its existence, and then clearly the 'I' and 'You' are given the possibility of being into reality'" (DBWE 2:88). For Bonhoeffer, human beings can only be placed into reality through God's revelation because "revelation gives itself without precondition and is alone able to place one into reality" (DBWE 2:89). Therefore, Bonhoeffer's Christological and

reality of Christ (*Christuswirklichkeit*) in Bonhoeffer's theology. In this work he discusses in detail the fundamentals, developments and consequences of the theology of Bonhoeffer (Rainer (1969).

theological thoughts proceed only from God to reality and not from reality to God.

Bonhoeffer explores and explains this idea of the reality of God with varied interpretations in his *Christology* and *Ethics*, and subsequent Bonhoeffer scholars continue to explore the thesis. In his *Christology*, Bonhoeffer summarises the following aspects. The concreteness of the reality of Christ, and God's concreteness in the Church, where Christ also became the historical reality. In his *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer also continues to develop the concept of reality, suggesting that the reality of God, Christ, and the world is the central theme of Christian ethics.

In his study of Bonhoeffer's concept of 'reality,' Hans Pfeiffer (2007:66) infers that "the concept of 'being' entails the convincing proposition that reality can only be seen in God. Bonhoeffer's "central theological idea is that Christ is the origin of reality by being present in the Church." For Pfeiffer, the term 'Christ exists as a community' is Bonhoeffer's concept of reality – an idea which Bonhoeffer expounds in his *Christology*.

Although Pfeiffer was convinced that Bonhoeffer finally came to define reality as God's 'this-worldliness' he still maintains that Christ is the origin of reality. Pfeiffer (2007:67) says:

In sum, reality for young Bonhoeffer has the shape of community. It is accessible only in Jesus Christ, who calls humans into responsibility through the human you. Christ is the origin of reality, by being present in the Church.

As expected, the discussions show a significant correlation exists between the concepts of 'reality' and the 'being' of the person. I discovered that the concepts of 'reality' and 'being' are interrelated to the idea of the reality of Christ, who can reveal himself in the church as a real person. Bonhoeffer summarises:

God 'is' in the relation of persons, and being is God's being person. But all this is comprehensible only for the person who is placed into the truth, through the person of Christ (DBWE 2:115).

One could then deduce that, according to Bonhoeffer, the culmination of relationships become 'comprehensible' only when individuals are positioned into the reality of Christ, that is, through His officiating work and His person as the Christ. I believe Bonhoeffer continually identifies the reality of the church with the presence of Christ, and by doing so, he can explore different aspects of reality from different perspectives about Christ's humanness, viz., as the divine-

human Being present in the community of faith. Overall, in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer's understanding of the church is continually dominated by his idea of reality that the divine-human 'Christ exists as a church community' (see DBWE 2:131f).

Thus far, I have reflected on Bonhoeffer's understanding of the 'being' of revelation and how he interprets the different modes 'being' presents itself. The first most prominent mode I have seen is that 'being' presents itself as 'Christ exists in the church' or synonymously as 'community' – the new humanity. Concerning 'being,' I discussed the following aspects—the relationship between the new humanity and Christ and how those relationships are transformed. I mainly focussed on, what form these relationships assumes in the community of faith, I did so within the framework of the reality of the 'being' of revelation. I discussed Christ's humanness to our humanness and explored how this relationship is enhanced in the church through the divine-human.

In essence, everything in *Act and Being* on the idea of the 'being' of revelation converges at one crucial concept, which Bonhoeffer continually highlights in *Act and Being*, that is, 'Christ exists as church community' (see Marsh 1994:119). Marsh suggests that Bonhoeffer "claims this axiom 'Christ exists as church community' that allows one to proceed beyond the impasse of imagining revelation in terms of strict non-objective conception of God" (Marsh 1994:119). Equally crucial for Marsh was that Bonhoeffer understood "the self-witness of God in the revelation of Jesus Christ as the reality within which the difference between human and divine is articulated" (Marsh 1994:119). Bonhoeffer understood that God chose to articulate himself as both human and divine in Christ. Bonhoeffer continually stressed that God revealed himself in the church as a person. The community was God's final revelation of himself as 'Christ existing as a church community' in his person. This view can be interpreted as being a manifestation of God Himself. More precisely, God brought Himself as the divine-human into a community in the person of Christ, in the church as 'Christ existing as church community' where He reveals His other-centeredness as both divine and human.

In discussing Bonhoeffer's axiom concerning Christ and community Phillips suggests that,

Bonhoeffer's axiom 'Christ exists as church community' is a depiction of Christ as the

representative of humanity, who restores all people to revelational communion with God, making possible a friendship with God, with others, and a reconciliation with oneself – the ‘new relationship’ of the Christian community. Christ’s death and resurrection revealed God’s incarnate love at the root of all community life and overcame the two great obstacles to human communion with God; sin and death. The revelation pulsates within the church. Bonhoeffer depicted revelation as basically God’s personal relationship to the community (Phillips 1994:90-91).

In accord with Phillips, Kelly suggests that Bonhoeffer’s axiom “‘Christ exists as church community’ can be seen as a description of ‘God incarnate’ personified in Jesus Christ and revealed in the church community ‘as a person in the church’” (Kelly 1990:76). For Kelly, “the Christian community is God’s final revelation: God as ‘Christ exists as a community,’ ordained for the rest of time until the end of the world” (Kelly 1990:76). It is in the Christian community where Christ “comes the very nearest to humanity so that his person unfolds in itself all whom he has won” (Kelly 1990:76). Then the church as the creation of Christ is the “one in which Christ reveals himself as the *deuteros anthropos*, the new man, or rather, the new humanity itself” (Kelly 1990:76). Accordingly, the *deuteros anthropos*, the new human, then exists as a divine-human, and ‘being’ revealed in the church becomes the central theme throughout Bonhoeffer’s *Act and Being*.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

In *Act and Being*, the aspect of God becoming human through Christ, revealing himself in the church becomes explicit, for the following reasons. At first, Christ’s revelation in the church by becoming human becomes explicit because of the strong emphasis Bonhoeffer places on the Protestant idea of the church, that is, a personal relationship with God appropriated through Christ. It becomes evident in *Act and Being* that Bonhoeffer relates the concept of the church in personal terms; this means that the church has to be conceived of in personal terms as God revealing His divine self in the church in ‘person’ as the divine-human Christ. Secondly, the idea of the ‘community of faith’ as being God’s final revelation of Himself in Christ becomes explicit because of the strong emphasis Bonhoeffer places on community. In essence, this community exists as a community of faith. The ideas, as mentioned earlier, are the closest Bonhoeffer can come in conveying the personal nature of God’s revelation, particularly on this occasion in the ‘person’ of Christ existing as a divine-human and, in turn living in the

community of faith.

To recapitulate, in *Act and Being*, one can infer that Bonhoeffer's Christology, predominately on the 'two natures' of Christ, surfaces in several different expressions that he uses. The phrases recurring in *Act and Being* are the ideas that God reveals "His divine self" in the church by dying and exposes "himself in the death of a man [Christ] who is condemned as a sinner" (see DBWE 2:17). Second, another expression recurring in *Act and Being* is the idea of God's "final revelation" of Christ in the community of faith, which later evolved into Bonhoeffer's axiom 'Christ exists as a church community.' This axiom is explored extensively in Bonhoeffer's earliest writing, *Sanctorum Communio*, in which 'the community of faith is presented as God's 'final revelation,' that is, 'Christ existing as a community.' One will soon discover in the reading *Act and Being* that these two expressions are related to the phrase the 'being of revelation,' which I discuss in detail in this study. These expressions all underpin Bonhoeffer's inferences to the 'two natures' of Christ, as found in *Act and Being*.

In the "Editors' Afterword" to *Act and Being* Hans-Richard Reuter acknowledges and strengthens the idea that Bonhoeffer's inferences on the 'two natures' of Christ in *Act and Being* are embedded in the Chalcedon definition. He states:

Bonhoeffer sees the problem of *Act and Being* suspended in the paradoxical statement of Chalcedon about the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ ('without confusion, without change,' 'without division, without separation'). The philosophical propaedeutic of *Act and Being* can be replaced by the acknowledgement of a conciliar decision of the church in which the metaphysical form of thought is already destroyed and a view on reality is opened up: Bonhoeffer's idea of Jesus Christ in *Act and Being* does exist as both human and divine (DBWE 2:180).

Without a doubt, in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer set about fashioning an anthropomorphic revelation, viz., that the divine-human Christ is a direct revelation of God. For Bonhoeffer, this valid disclosure of God cannot take place outside the event of God (*beisichselbst*) by revealing himself through Christ as the embodiment of the divine-human. In this way, Bonhoeffer fashions an embodiment theology, namely of the divine-human who is present as 'Christ existing in the church.' One could deduce that Bonhoeffer is fashioning a theology of revelation around God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. In doing so, Bonhoeffer assures us that God is with us in person existing as Christ and also with us in the community of faith.

Moreover, in *Act and Being*, there is a distinctive development in Bonhoeffer's Christology, particularly his evolving views on the 'two natures' of Christ. This idea one finds in conjunction with Bonhoeffer's interpretation of God's 'being' of revelation and how it is appropriated in the church community, given that 'Christ exists as church community' as the divine-human.



Chapter 6 Christology

6.1 Introduction

During the summer session of 1933, Bonhoeffer presented a series of lectures on Christology at the University of Berlin. These lectures were first published posthumously in German in 1958 based on carefully reconstructed sets of student notes. In 1966 an English translation by John Bowden appeared as *Christology* and similarly an American edition titled *Christ the Center* (see also the 1966 English edition). The latest adaptation of the 2009 English Edition (DBWE 12:299-360) offers a more precise scholarly interpretation of the *Christology* lectures.

The translators of the latest edition assert that in previous translations, certain essential aspects were overlooked, such as Bonhoeffer's deliberate selection of certain words. In earlier translations, "translators have always noted Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the 'who' question as to the right Christological one, the 'how' question is the wrong one" (DBWE 12:45). According to earlier translators, Bonhoeffer answers the 'who' question in this way: that Jesus Christ is the God who became the *human-God* (the German term was *Menschgewordene* – 'God becoming human').

The translators of the 2009 English edition propose that the earlier translation missed the intended meaning because the earlier translators suggest that,

When Bonhoeffer spoke of God becoming human, he used the word form *Menschwerdung*, though he warned that this was not to be understood as an answer to the 'how' question. That is, it is not an explanation of the process of how God became human (DBWE 12:45).

On the whole, in Bonhoeffer's writings, there is always a distinct difference in his usage of the words *Menschgeworden* and *Menschwerdung*. *Menschwerdung* appears consistently in the context of revelation. In contrast, *Menschgeworden* is used in the context of the sacraments and the cross, respectively used in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* as God becoming fully human. Therefore, the word that Bonhoeffer chooses to use in his Christology lectures is *Menschgeworden* above *Menschwerdung*. The word *Menschgeworden* in the lectures by Bonhoeffer not only suggests the idea of a *human-God* but also signify the concept of God taking on our flesh, that is, God took on our full humanity and became fully human.

In this chapter, I will use the term *human-God* to reference the word *Menschgeworden*. Bonhoeffer uses the word *Menschgeworden* to emphasise the concept of *bodiliness*. In the lectures, Bonhoeffer expands the idea of *bodiliness*, particularly in his discussion on the ‘sacraments’ and ‘humiliation.’ The Word of God not only becomes flesh but also human by representing ‘humiliation’ theologically. Bonhoeffer emphasises that the symbols of the cross and sacrifice become precisely the humiliation of God, who became fully human. The translation issues mentioned above are significant for my study of the ‘two natures’ of Christ in the *Christology* lectures because of Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on the concept of *bodiliness*.

Unlike *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, the *Christology* in the *Christology* lectures is lucid and well-defined. Bonhoeffer arranged the *Christology* lectures sequentially by dividing them into two parts, which are easy to follow. In Part One – *The present Christ* – Bonhoeffer suggests that Christ must not be viewed outside history; He is the present Christ both as the crucified and resurrected Christ present in the church as a person. In Part Two – *The Historical Christ* – Bonhoeffer examines Christ’s existence within the context of negative Christology, referring to the critical Christology as developed in the “decisions of the councils who expressed only the conclusions of critical [negative] Christology,” that is, the negating of false views or heresies (see DBWE 12:332). Besides, it 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. This study 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).

Bonhoeffer concludes that,

The progress made between one council and the next was always due to the appearance of men who worked on positive Christology. The official church makes critical Christology its business – setting the limits, issuing negative statements – because in the church, the proclamation of the living Christ is always taking place alongside the decisions of councils (DBWE 12:332).

Given this significance of the text and the sequential order and the discoveries made by

translators, I'll follow Bonhoeffer's *Christology* lecture by lecture, explaining what each lecture says about Christology and the 'two natures' of Christ. My selections on Bonhoeffer's Christology are carefully chosen to illustrate Bonhoeffer's view on the 'two natures' of Christ found in each lecture. I select those extracts that show the influence the Chalcedon Definition held over Bonhoeffer's intention to preserve the identity of the 'two natures' of Christ. In sum, the extracts are all significant in understanding Bonhoeffer's theological development while writing the *Christology*. Uncovering Bonhoeffer's views on the 'two natures' of Christ will allow me to consolidate the continuity in his thinking and his Christology.

Also, I will take into account Bonhoeffer's earlier writings to connect similar concepts that appear in both his previous writings and in his *Christology* lectures. The intent is to establish whether there is continuity between Bonhoeffer's earlier writings and his *Christology*. I propose that *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* could be the best place to start tracing Bonhoeffer's development and his thinking on the divinity of Christ. *Christology* is the unpacking of aspects of Christ's divinity and humanity found in his earlier writings by following his understanding of the Chalcedonian Definition of the 'two natures' of Christ.

In summing up their significance Kelly (1990:118) suggests that these lectures were designed for Christological reflection to both aid and "urge the church to ask the haunting Christological question: Who is Jesus in the world of 1933 and where is he to be found?" Bonhoeffer's Christological reflections thus posed a challenge to the church. Kelly also argues "that people can encounter Christ as a person only in relationship with other people. It is, therefore, the duty of the believing community to enable people to recognise Christ's presence in the world" as both human and divine (see Kelly 1990:119).

6.2 Introduction to Bonhoeffer's idea of Christology and his Development of the Christological question

The *Christology* lectures are often regarded as Bonhoeffer's major theological work on Christology and should maybe be treated as such. Also, I assume that Bonhoeffer's *Christology* appears to be an outburst of a frustrated Bonhoeffer against misinterpreted theologies of the historical Jesus presented by Schleiermacher and others; and in their misunderstanding of

Christology brought about by the Christological heresies of the fourth through fifth centuries, as discussed in Chapter Three. Therefore, in *Christology* Bonhoeffer, painstakingly sets out his understanding of Christology as opposed to other Christologies. This became important for Bonhoeffer to avoid slipping “into a theological mire of speculative analyses into how the incarnation was possible” as cautioned by Kelly (1984:38).

In discussing Bonhoeffer’s *Christology* particularly on the ‘two natures’ of Christ, Kelly maintains:

[What becomes important for Bonhoeffer is] to discern the concrete presence of Jesus Christ within the world without speculative analyses or into the exact demarcation between the divine and human in Jesus. Bonhoeffer refused to take for a beginning in *Christology* any abstract conceptualisation of incarnation. If Chalcedon could set limits of Christological discourse by affirming the ‘two natures’, this did not mean that Christians should be forever locked into mere repetition of the incarnation formula (Kelly 1984:38f).

Christology introduces Bonhoeffer’s response to the Christological question about transcendence,⁵⁰ in particular, about the human person who is transcendent. Bonhoeffer lays the foundation for Christology in the following ways. In the first place, Christology is not only the ‘doctrine of Christ, but Christology is also ‘logology,’⁵¹ in turn, Christology is also about Christ, about the one who ‘becomes the center of knowledge.’ Moreover, Christology is about the Word who became flesh. Lastly, Bonhoeffer’s Christology is about a “human person who is the transcendent” [one] (see DBWE 12:301). Regarding transcendence, the essence of Bonhoeffer’s Christology is that Christ is a *human-God* (the Christ is the human person), the human person who is transcendent. So if we point to Christology as the centre of knowledge, it looks to the transcendence of the incarnate one.

Equally important, in the *Christology* lectures, the question about transcendence brings Bonhoeffer to discuss the proof of Jesus’ nature or power. He states that Jesus’ supremacy is wholly independent of the material universe, and therefore no attestation is needed. Bonhoeffer acknowledged that the ultimate reality of God is found in God’s not having to prove the

⁵⁰ In *The Form of Christ in the World: A study of Bonhoeffer’s Christology*, Phillips (1967:75-79) elaborates extensively on Bonhoeffer’s concept of transcendence.

⁵¹ In theology ‘logology’ is the study of words in search of divine truth.

transcendence of the Word, particularly Jesus' divinity. Bonhoeffer substantiates this notion by affirming, "the fact that the Logos became flesh, a human being, is the prerequisite, not the proof" (DBWE 12:301). Bonhoeffer considers it never the proof that is needed but rather "it has to be so because the transcendent is always only the prerequisite for our thinking" (see DBWE 12:301). This means that the transcendent does not require an object to provide proof, for if it did, "it would no longer be the transcendent" (see DBWE 12:301). In actuality, the "Logos [Jesus] we are talking about here is a person. This human person is the transcendent" (DBWE 12:301). This human person is 'God who became human' (*Menschgeworden*); that is, God took on human nature⁵², and in so doing, God became fully human.

Very early in his *Christology* lectures, Bonhoeffer repeatedly expresses the idea that God took on our flesh in the human person Christ (and in so doing, God became fully human). This idea gives us insight into the starting point of Bonhoeffer's understanding of the Chalcedon Definition, namely, on the humanity of Christ (the Logos that became flesh).

Along similar lines, Phillips suggests that throughout his *Christology*, Bonhoeffer adheres to his understanding of the Chalcedon Definition of Christology regarding the humanity and divinity of Christ. Phillips concludes that,

The problem of Christology [Bonhoeffer] repeats again and again 'is not the relationship of an isolated God to an isolated man', but rather the relationship of the given human – God to the world of the flesh. In Bonhoeffer's last analysis, [he] rejects all questions which attempt to go beyond the Chalcedonian formula. For Christological questions must be framed in such a way that they neither call the Godhood of Christ into question nor destroy his manhood (Phillips 1967:80).

To strengthen his argument on the aspect of the *human-God*, Bonhoeffer introduces the idea of scholarship. He says: "Christology as the doctrine about Christ is a rather peculiar area of scholarship, [to the extent that] Christ is the very word of God" (see DBWE 12:301). He continues that Christology should not be seen only as an arcane theological discipline but should also as a scholarly discipline. For Bonhoeffer, "Christology, as the doctrine about Christ, is rather a peculiar area of scholarship, to the extent that] Christ is the very Word of

⁵² This was also the starting point for Docetist who taught that the God-Logos assumed the whole nature of humans with flesh and soul, but had not assumed the mind (νοῦς) of humans who are governed by their personality.

God” – that is the mystery of the incarnation (DBWE 12:301). Therefore, “to speak of Christ is to be silent, and to be silent about Christ is to speak” about the revelation of God that took place through Christ the Word (the incarnation) (DBWE 12:300). For Bonhoeffer Christology occupies the centre of scholarship because it is “only scholarship that knows itself to be within the realm of the Christian church which could agree here that Christology is the centre of the realm of scholarship itself” (DBWE 12:301). Bonhoeffer turns to how scholarship typically proceeds, namely by asking two questions, the how and the why, whereas Christology asks the question “who.” Bonhoeffer asserts that “all scholarly questions can be reduced to two fundamental questions: What is the cause of x? What is the meaning of x?” (see DBWE 12:301). To ask these questions is already to presuppose an answer. For Bonhoeffer, object X is grasped by natural science and understood in its causal relationship with other known objects, and by the arts X is perceived by being understood in its significance and its relation to other subjects.

[Therefore] it is about classification of relationships – how does object X fit into the classification that I already have at hand? How is it possible to classify an object? This is important for the question of Christology. The object is defined, recognized and understood by means of its possibilities, by means of its ‘How,’ by the immanent logos of human beings (DBWE 12:301-302).

Besides classifying relationships objectively, via the sciences and the arts, Bonhoeffer understood an essential aspect of Christology to be defined by classification. The classification of an object employing its ‘How’; ‘How’ can Jesus be both God and Human? In discussing this ‘How’ question, Holmes suggests that,

The enemy of any Christology which would purport to be faithful to the biblical witness was, for Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to ask the ‘how’ question. The ‘how’ question in Christology is pernicious because its ‘final prerequisite’ is ‘the immanent logos of human beings.’ Conceiving Christ within our ‘logos classification system’, which is to account for Christ in accordance with human reason – is deeply problematic as it detracts attention from the fundamental question, that is, the ‘who’ question (Holmes 2014:28 and see DBWE 12:302).

This concerned Bonhoeffer because the ‘How’ question becomes the ‘godless’ question, a question about immanence,⁵³ the immanent logos of human beings. The ‘How’ question

⁵³ For Bonhoeffer Jesus is fully present in the physical world and thus accessible to us in various ways. Christian faith asserts the transcendence of the Biblical God (this is the first Person in the Trinity) and combines it with His relatedness to man’s universe primarily through the incarnation, i.e., the second Person in the Trinity, as well as through other ‘intermediaries.’ But it is important to note in what form this relationship occurs.

presents the opportunity to transition to the question about immanence. Unlike transcendence that has to do with the ‘God who became human,’ immanence has to do with the idea of human reasoning, that is, the human logos who attempts to understand Christ and grasp him as a subject matter (as an ‘ology’). To counteract human reasoning (the question about immanence), Bonhoeffer presents us with the other Logos, the counter Logos (*Gegenlogos*). If we put human reasoning aside, Bonhoeffer concludes: “all that remains is the Christological question: Who are you? Are you God’s very self? This is the question with which Christology alone is concerned”; Christology is concerned with the other Logos. The question of ‘who’ for Bonhoeffer is always the question of transcendence. ‘He is the Logos’ (see DBWE 12:302).

Bethge believes that Bonhoeffer’s idea of transcendence dismisses all the questions about immanence and answers the questions, ‘Who are you? Speak’, ‘Who are you? Are you God himself?’ and therefore Bonhoeffer dismisses,

... all speculative questions which try to break open the Logos-Christ and reduce the personal element in Him to metaphysical substances and His transcendence to immanent classification (Bethge 1967:72).

Pangritz also suggests that “once we accept [Bonhoeffer’s idea] that Christ is ‘the Counter logos,’ it becomes clear that Bonhoeffer approves the dogma of the ‘two natures’ of Christ, which is so central [to Bonhoeffer’s] conception” (see Pangritz 1999:140).

If both Bethge and Pangritz’ assumptions are appropriate, then it would be reasonably accurate to deduce that Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the ‘two natures’ of Christ in his *Christology* is based upon his interpretation of the creed of the early church fathers (Chalcedon 451). The Chalcedon Definition (451) confessed Jesus as ‘complete in Godhead and complete in manhood,’ truly God and truly human existing as divine and being at the same time human: without confusion, without change, without separation, and without division. One may, therefore, conclude that Bonhoeffer accepted the classical Chalcedon formulation of Christology, that is, that the ‘Counter Logos’ has superseded any objectifying thought-forms.

Transcendence as such enters into immanence as such. In the process it does not forfeit its transcendence: the ‘human-God’ remains ‘all God,’ though He be also ‘all man’, i.e., both transcendence and immanence retain all of their original natures. They merely occur together, in one phenomenon, event, or person (Schwarzschild 1964:72).

Equally important for Bonhoeffer, Pangritz suggests, is that,

... the 'two natures' should not be treated like two distinguishing entities, separate from each other, until they come together in Christ; and according to Bonhoeffer, the doctrine of the *human-God*, Jesus Christ, has found its 'classical formulation' in the Chalcedonian Definition (Pangritz 1999:140).

Pangritz confirms, "Bonhoeffer's understanding of the doctrine of the *human-God* continued to remain the same" (Pangritz 1999:140), specifically in *Christology*. Bonhoeffer continues to confess Christ as the true God and *human-God*, who, at the same time, is found in the church.

Bonhoeffer clearly states that,

... it is in the church, where Christ has revealed himself as the Word of God ... [and where] the human logos ask the question: Who are you, Jesus Christ? Logos of God! The answer is given. The church receives it every day anew (DBWE 12:304).

In principle, the Christological question ('who?') for Bonhoeffer becomes an ontological question. Bonhoeffer states that,

...The 'who' question's purpose is to bring out the ontological structure of the 'who', without getting caught in either the Scylla of the 'how question' or the Charybdis of the 'that question' (DBWE 12:304).

Being between Scylla and Charybdis is an idiom derived from Greek mythology, meaning 'having to choose between two evils.' In this instance, in *Christology*, it is about the 'how' and 'that' questions related to the 'who' question.

Pangritz's observations of Bonhoeffer's 'who' question, as discussed above, is worth mentioning here since he suggests that "the Christological question 'who' is legitimately asked in the 'setting of the church,' only where the answer is already given" (Pangritz 1999:137).

Pangritz' rationale for his observation is this:

[For Bonhoeffer] Christology can do nothing but unfold this question 'Who?', and in this way 'Christology should be acknowledged – a definition which certainly can be accepted within the sphere of the church only (Pangritz 1999:137).

In other words, Bonhoeffer asserts that if the question of 'who' is understood in the context of the church, it will present us with a point of departure from the historical Jesus (the 'human logos') to the present Christ (the *human-God*). It will point us to the present Christ, who is only to be found within the sphere of the church. This idea of Christ existing within the sphere of the church is not new in Bonhoeffer's corpus; he develops this idea in his earlier writings,

which strongly suggests a continuity of thought and theology.

At this juncture of the lectures, Bonhoeffer turns his attention from the 'who' question to the present Christ in history, as discussed in the next section. Bonhoeffer voices his final concerns and conclusion to his Christological question by saying:

Christ is the Christ of history, the whole Christ, whom we ask and answers? But Christology asks not about what Christ has done but rather who Christ is. To put it in the abstract: The personal ontological structure of the whole, historical Christ is the subject matter of Christology (DBWE 12:310).

Bonhoeffer's concern is not what Christ has achieved, but instead that Christology should ask who Christ is because the historical Christ is currently the subject matter of Christology.

6.3 Part 1 – The present Christ – The *pro-me*

In this section of *Christology*, Bonhoeffer positions his discussion on the *pro-me* structure in such a way that it is easy to follow his argument on the different forms Christ assumes *pro-me*; regarding his relationship to 'the new humanity.' Besides, Bonhoeffer's discussion on the *pro-me* structure becomes representative of the place Christ takes up in different spheres of His existence as the human person and as the transcendent one.

In this section, I will explore Bonhoeffer's explanations on the concepts of the form of Christ as Word, Sacrament, and as Church community (synonymous with Bonhoeffer's expression of the 'new humanity') concerning the 'two natures' of Christ. Interestingly, it is through these three concepts that one can trace Bonhoeffer's understanding of the presence of Christ. My investigation of the text will reveal that Bonhoeffer discards the idea of the historical Jesus as inconsequential if Jesus Christ is only present in history. On the contrary, for Bonhoeffer, Christ must be present and exist as the present Christ now in both His human and divine forms, existing as Word, as Sacrament, and as Church community. Bonhoeffer asserts:

This is the first statement: That Christ is the Christ who is present in history. Christ in his person is indeed present in the church as person. Thus the presence of Christ is there in the Church [Community]. Only because Christ is the Christ who is present are we still able to inquire of him. Only because proclamation [Word] and the Sacraments are carried out in the church can we inquire about Christ (DBWE 12:310).

Before discussing how Christ is present in His person as 'word,' 'sacrament' and 'community' Bonhoeffer argues that the following questions necessitate an answer: "In what form is Christ

present *pro-me*?” and “How must Christ’s presence be understood and interpreted?” In reply, Bonhoeffer points towards the various attempts made by scholars to answer these questions; by considering multiple perspectives to the understanding of the real presence of Christ. Individual scholars had ventured to “reach across history” to bring the image of Christ into view, while others see the image of Christ face-to-face. The latter attempted to present the image of Christ as either “that of the enlightenment and rationalism, or the inner life of Christ” (see DBWE 12:310). Bonhoeffer designates Wilhelm Herrmann as subscribing to the latter, and Friedrich Schleiermacher as subscribing to both the former and latter by implying that the two went “hand in hand.” Albrecht Ritschl “subscribed to the former,”; and last of all, Luther subscribed to neither but made this concept, the presence of Christ, understandable in terms of the “concept of ascension” (see DBWE 12:311).

In the same manner, Phillips also postulates that Bonhoeffer’s question: “In what form is Christ present *pro-me*?” should be understood in relation to Christ’s being. Phillips posits that,

... the heart of Bonhoeffer’s lectures [*Christology*] is his argument that the total orientation of the personal structure of Christ is *pro-me*: Christ’s being-for-me is not some ‘power’ which he possesses but rather the definition of his being (Phillips 1967:80).

Thus for Phillips, the proper question to ask about Christology would be, “In what form is Christ present *pro-me*, and may we only ask after the form and place of presence?” That is, in what form and where is he present as the *human-God*? (see Phillips 1967:81).

Besides, in *Christology*, Bonhoeffer is more concerned about what the full extent of Christ is present with us in the ‘now’ means; and not only concerned about the form in which Christ is present. Thus, for Bonhoeffer, the presence of Christ means that Christ is in the same place at the same time; notwithstanding, it means Christ’s presence is found in the church. Bonhoeffer explains, in simple terms, how to understand the real presence of Christ as both human and divine. He says:

[When] we are talking about Christ’s ability to be simultaneously present to us all – even as the Risen One – Jesus remains the human Jesus [‘second’ incarnation]. Only because he is human can he be present to us. But that he is eternally with us here, eternally with us in the now – that is his presence as God [his divinity]. Only because Jesus is God [his divinity] can he be present to us. The presence of Christ compels the statement that Jesus is wholly human, as well as the other statement that Jesus is wholly God – otherwise he

would not be present. Thus, from the presence of Christ arises the twofold certainty that he is both human being and God [his divinity]. (DBWE 12:312).

The above formulation gives us a more in-depth insight into Bonhoeffer's understanding of Christ's real presence. It is therefore helpful for my understanding of Bonhoeffer's views on the nature of Christ's presence that I explain as follows.

For Bonhoeffer, Jesus in his human form can be present with us now; and only because Jesus is God can he be present with us now. "Thus from the presence of Christ arises the twofold certainty that he [Jesus] is both human being and God" (DBWE 12:312). Not only does Bonhoeffer stress that Jesus is present with us like God, but it also explains that Christ is also present with us in every respect as a human. Therefore, for Bonhoeffer, if Jesus were not with us as God and in every respect in his presence as a human, then he would not be present at all.

The explanation above confirms that Bonhoeffer understood the 'two natures' of Christ, and he understood that Christ is present with us as both human and divine. Bonhoeffer held to his convictions by following the Chalcedon Definition of the 'two natures' of Christ. Bonhoeffer understood that Jesus and God could not exist in isolation; he concluded that in similitude, "it is just as impossible to ask how God can enter into time" (DBWE 12:313). In dealing with the question of Christ's presence Bonhoeffer asserts that "the only question that makes sense and should be asked is: Who is present, who is with us here and now?" (DBWE 12:313). I imagine Bonhoeffer would undoubtedly reply: The *human-God* Jesus is present with us here and now, and in saying so, he would confirm his adherence to the Chalcedon formulation of the 'two natures' of Christ.

In the first section of Part One of *Christology*, Bonhoeffer focuses predominantly on the humanity of Christ. He shifts his attention in the second section in Part One, focusing on the divinity of Christ. He clarifies this transition by saying that we "cannot know who the human Christ is if [we] do not simultaneously think of the God-Christ and vice versa. God, in his timeless eternity, is not God" (DBWE 12:313). Conversely, Jesus Christ, in His humanity, limited in time, is not Jesus Christ. Instead, Bonhoeffer asserts that in the human being, Jesus Christ, God is God (see DBWE 12:313). Christ and God are in the same place at the same time.

This becomes a good starting point to understand Bonhoeffer's Christology, which centres around the *human-God* as the present Christ who exists as divine (see DBWE 12:313).

In this regard, Kelly's assumptions seem to be implausible as he questions the meaning of the present Christ as the *human-God*. Kelly implies that it is in Bonhoeffer's views on the present Christ that "we meet the first Christological problem" (see Kelly 1990:123). Kelly's modification is that,

... Rather we may say that in the man Jesus, God is God. In this Jesus Christ, God is present as the one *human-God*. In this Jesus Christ, God is present. This one *human-God* is the starting point for Christology (Kelly 1990:123).

I maintain that Kelly's explanations do not seem to support his conclusions. He does not take into regard that Bonhoeffer does not make this distinction "that in the man Jesus, God is God ... this one *human-God*". On the contrary, Bonhoeffer establishes that the present Christ should be understood as having more than one characteristic; and that He exists as both human and divine. To put it concisely, for Bonhoeffer, Christ is the veiled *human-God* that existed before time and is now present in time. It is from this outlook that Bonhoeffer could imply that the present Christ, the *human-God* is also further presented in the world in different forms (that I will discuss in detail below).

In sum, by implication, Christ, the *human-God*, is truly present in the world. Bonhoeffer's concern remains: "In what state does He [the *human-God* Jesus Christ] represent himself?" (DBWE 12:315). Particularly, in what form and place is He present in the world? Bonhoeffer answers: "Therefore the *human-God* Jesus Christ is the one who, in his *pro-me* structure, is present in his person to the church as Word, sacrament, and church community" (DBWE 12:315).

What follows are detailed explanations of how Bonhoeffer understood the '*pro-me*' structure concerning Jesus Christ as the *human-God*. Bonhoeffer fashions Jesus Christ in his '*pro-me*' structure as being present in His person to the church in the following ways. 'Christ is present in Word,' 'Christ is present in the sacrament,' and 'Christ is present in the church community.' To be exact, as the *human-God* Jesus Christ is present in the church in the threefold form as 'word,' 'sacrament' and 'church community.' I will offer a comprehensive discussion of the

form that Christ takes as “the God-human Jesus Christ is the one who, in his *pro-me* structure, is present in his person to the church as Word” (see DBWE 12:315).

In *Christology*, Bonhoeffer will often interconnect the properties of Christ with the Word of God. At the onset of his discussion on the Word of God (‘Christ existing as Word’), Bonhoeffer asserts that a distinct boundary exists when referring to the Word of God; He insists that we cannot refer to the Word of God from the point of a human logos view. This view suggests that the human logos exists as a word in the form of an idea. By contrast, Bonhoeffer asserts that we must first talk about “Christ as the Word of God in the sense of a word spoken to us”; and then talk about the Word of God as “Christ existing as Word as a living entity” (see DBWE 12:316).

Bonhoeffer affirms that the phrase “Christ existing as Word as a living entity” can be understood in different ways. First, it can be understood as God’s active Word presenting itself “as truth breaking into a concrete moment”; [and] as “God speaking to us through revelation” (of Christ) (see DBWE 12:317). He concludes that it is to this end that God speaks to us through the revelation of Christ at the right time through God’s determination. This is significant because through revelation, “both the contingent character of Christ’s revelation and his commitment to humankind” is expressed (see DBWE 12:317). For the most part, in *Christology*, the idea “Christ existing as Word as a living entity” can be understood like this: God revealed Himself through his Word as ‘Christ existing as Word’ as a *human-God*.

Characteristically for Bonhoeffer, “Christ is by nature God’s active Word spoken to me, ‘*pro-me*’” (DBWE 12:317). Bonhoeffer states that “this prerequisite determines what the content will be ... Christ is God’s word personally addressed to the human being” (DBWE 12:317). Bonhoeffer’s idea of the presence of the *human-God*, as the active Word of God, meant two things: First, “that Christ is, in his person, the Word of God” and that “God’s revelation was in Him who, in his person, is the Word” (DBWE 12:317). Bonhoeffer concludes:

This Christ who is the Word in person is present in the word of the church or as the word of the church. His presence is, by nature, his existence as preaching. His presence is not power or the objective spirit of the church community out of which it preaches, but rather his presence is preaching. The sermon is the form of the present Christ (DBWE 12:317).

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 (DBWE 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 *promevity* 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 *promevity*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 *promevity* 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 'promevity' 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. Wannewetsch (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, Wannewetsch 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 (Wannewetsch 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, Wannewetsch 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 [Wannewetsch] 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

that Bonhoeffer purposefully expressed his emotions in relation to his Christology. Bonhoeffer accepts that his humanness, suffering and impending death are in some way related to his humanness in sharing in Christ's humanness and suffering, as the Christ too was faced with death (see DBWE 8:459).

Further vestiges of Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Letters and Papers from Prison* can be traced to his ideas on the relationship between the Old and New Testaments – he believed one could locate the image of the Christ to the Old Testament. Bonhoeffer alleged that the Old and New Testament were both Christologically orientated, and the Christological union that existed between the God of the Old Testament and Jesus of the New Testament became apparent in the Psalms.⁹⁹ Bonhoeffer considered the Psalms as having great significance to the Christian's life. Reed suggests that,

Bonhoeffer approached scripture from a Christological point of view: The Old Testament bears witness to Christ. Moreover, Christ is present in the Old Testament as well as the New (Reed 1996:30).

For Bonhoeffer, the Old Testament books held both strong Christological characteristics and contained relevant proclamations for the Christian's life. The Psalms express and explain the nature and work of Jesus Christ. Feil suggests that Bonhoeffer based his relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament,

... on the foundation of Jesus Christ as the 'one for others,' [and] Bonhoeffer developed a view of transcendence and understanding of the world in which the two elements (Old and New Testaments) are inseparable (Feil 1985:95).

Furthermore, in the Editor's Introduction of *Creation and Fall* the editor notes that,

Bonhoeffer's own growing love for the Old Testament contributed a great deal to his quite different approach. This love, which is already so apparent in *Creation and Fall*, was expressed in the prison writings especially in his appreciation of the "earthiness" of the Hebrew Bible. His later biblical insights into the "worldliness" of Christianity in "a world come of age" is also rooted in his understanding that the New Testament must be read in the light of the Old. ... Thus what he wrote in his letters from prison is already foreshadowed in *Creation and Fall* (DBWE 3:10).

In this chapter, I examined specific letters, scattered notes, and undated letters for Christological references related to the 'two natures' of Christ. In doing so, I uncovered some

⁹⁹ There are over 60 references to the Psalms in *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

concepts Bonhoeffer discussed in his earlier writings, to which he refers in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*. This suggests that a strong continuity existed in his theology and Christology in both his earlier and posthumous writings; and that he continually adhered to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ.

9.8 Concluding Remarks

It is plausible to conclude that several limitations exist to interpret *Letters and Papers from Prison* adequately. First, the number of topics and the variety of audiences Bonhoeffer addresses is a limitation that could lead one to get lost in the prison letters. Secondly, variances can be found in the letters that could cause conjecture and different interpretations, giving rise to the formulation of different liberal theologies. To establish consistency, I have to substantiate the argument presented in this chapter. That is, whether Bonhoeffer’s theology in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, particularly his Christology on the ‘two natures’ of Christ, prevails in his letters; and whether one can ascertain that the letters have specific relevance for the present church. I draw on secondary scholarship and my analysis of extracts to corroborate continuity in Bonhoeffer’s theology, which I assume, and show how the theology of the letters are relevant for Christianity today.

I infer that attempting to understand Bonhoeffer’s Christology, viz., the ‘two natures’ of Christ in his prison theology, demands a clear distinction between the person and the work of Christ. When Bonhoeffer speaks about the person of Christ, he sets this against the being of God as revealed in Christ in the church, more precisely, the ‘being of transcendence’ of the ‘who’ (as discussed in section 3). For Bonhoeffer, who Christ is for us today is “the object of faith ... [in] the person of Christ, which is preached in the congregation” (see Prenter 1967:124). When Bonhoeffer speaks about the work of Christ, he sets this against Christ’s Lordship. For Bonhoeffer, the church lives under the reality of the Lordship of Christ. Bethge asserts that for Bonhoeffer

This Lordship is proclaimed by the church in words. And this Lordship is asserted by Christ’s vicarious suffering and reconciling men in the world. The commission of this Lordship extends to the church, which must know it, and to the state which may or may not know it (Bethge 1967:42).

To conclude, the God who became human, as explained in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, has to be understood as God's 'being of transcendence,' namely, the revelation of God through Christ who exists in the Christian community, the church, both as human and divine.

The church needs to identify with Jesus Christ (the revelation of God) who became the human for others, because if Christ is presently understood as being in the church as both divine and human, then this would demand certain kinds of responses from the church. In response, the church will recognise its mission as the church of Christ by presently being the church that exists as a community. Given that Jesus lives in the church community as both human and divine, consequently, the church will carry out her mission as the church, existing for others as Christ became the human for others. At the time, the church's "ethical behaviour will be grounded in Christology from start to finish" (see Moltmann 1967:111). In effect, the church engages communities in all social aspects as the church for others; because the church's example is drawn from Jesus Christ, who existed as God in human form and yet not for himself but by existing for others (see DBWE 8:501). The church responds to the mission of God "to live in Christ to exist for others," even to the point of suffering (see DBWE 8:480). For Bonhoeffer, "the human being is called upon to share in God's suffering at the hands of a godless world" (see DBWE 8:480). Bonhoeffer's notions on 'vicarious representative action' are fundamental to his theology on suffering in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Moltmann emphasises that, for Bonhoeffer, "through the vicarious action of Christ, man is incorporated into the whole person – and thus the new man is possible only within the church" (see Moltmann 1967:124). In effect, the 'vicarious representative action' of Christ is put in force only in Christ and in his church and "is the life-principle of the new mankind" (see Moltmann 1967:103).

On the whole, the church's mission must be grounded in Christ's humanity; by being the church community existing for others. Consequently, the church becomes astute in responsiveness to Christ existing as a human within the church community, meaning that the Christian who desires to serve God must participate in His suffering. Borowitz purports that,

... the Christian who wishes to serve God ... must go out in the world. He too must

witness and, if need be, suffer. The Christ does not save men from the need to act but, precisely on the cross, gives them a model of what it means to love God ... for the disciple of the Christ it means selfless participation with its concomitant suffering (Borowitz 1965:85, 87).

Bethge also remarks that when Christians share in the vicarious suffering of Christ,

[Then] only he who participates in Jesus' suffering may speak the renewing word of his participation ... and speaking at all costs everywhere and to everybody is centrally the involvement in the figure of Christ (Bethge 1967:81).

Bethge reflects that, because "Bonhoeffer himself acted vicariously [while being incarcerated] in anonymity and silence, that it is precisely this which enabled him to speak loudly now" to the church to share in the suffering of Christ in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* (see Bethge 1967:82).

In reflecting on what was necessary for Bonhoeffer while being in prison, Moltmann suggests that Bonhoeffer stressed that the church community should continue to have a "concern for others"; and become "the Church for the world"; by "participating in the world" (see Moltmann 1967:110). These crucial aspects are all related to Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Moltmann suggests that most of Bonhoeffer's phrases, like 'the man for others', are grounded in Christology and asserts that

... the very use of the word 'participation' [in the letters] shows that ... Bonhoeffer does speak of Christ as an 'example' ... and goes on to base it on the incarnation [and all] the characteristic keywords, vicarious action, incarnation, provide the clue to the Christological sources of Bonhoeffer's thought [in the *Letters and Papers from Prison*] (Moltmann 1967:110).

The phrase, 'participating in the world' and 'concern for others' conveys the ideas of the 'incarnation' and 'transcendence' that Bonhoeffer assumes in the *Letters and Papers from Prison*. For Bonhoeffer, the 'incarnation' speaks of Christ as an example for humanity; because the incarnation has its origin in the humanity of Jesus Christ, and when Bonhoeffer speaks of the concern of Jesus for others he relates it to the experience of 'transcendence.' Our direct faith in Jesus becomes our participation in Jesus' incarnation [God becoming human] (see DBWE 8:501).

Barry Harvey who discusses Bonhoeffer's ideas on the church community in his prison letters asserts that,

The understanding of the church sketched here [in the prison letters] does not relate to the world as one of a number of self-regulating sub-systems operating within the comprehensive life-world of liberal society, as secular social theory views it, nor does it attempt to relate them dialectically, but as a church with a distinctive polity in the midst of a world (Harvey 1997:338).

Harvey maintains that one can understand Bonhoeffer's concepts of the church community in his prison letters only in relation to his Christology. Harvey suggests that Bonhoeffer's Christology was distinct since,

Bonhoeffer recognised the need to preserve and foster those practices and conversations that constitute the church as a distinctive polity amid a world (Harvey 1997:335).

For Bonhoeffer, this meant that the church served at least in the following ways. First, the church served as "the body of Christ with an 'inseparable and yet unconfused' bond between the followers of Christ and the earthly-historical form of God's self-interpretation, when God, the Son, took upon himself human nature" (see Harvey 1997:336). Second, the church served as "the *embodiment* of all human possibilities" and does not stop with the physical life of Jesus but encompasses consubstantially all that Jesus offers for the ongoing growth of the church (see Harvey 1997:336). For Harvey when these two functions of the church are "combined with respect to the life of the church, we can say that the body politic of Christ fosters a distinctive politics of the body" and "within the ordinations of the church, the divine *cantus firmus* incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth it 'forms one body with our body'" (see Harvey 1997:338).

In the prison letters, Bonhoeffer is concerned about the ongoing life of the church after the fall of Nazism. He anticipates that the current life of the God who became human should continue to live on in the church as both divine and human. Bonhoeffer assumes in his earlier writings that the church community must continue to exist in the world as the body of Christ. This antithesis between the church being born in the world, and existing as a church community becomes explicit in Bonhoeffer's corpus. In fact, for Bonhoeffer, God's purpose for assuming the form of humanity in the world and becoming human is related to the church who assumes the form of God. The church becomes relevant by being of use today; for this reason, Bonhoeffer poses the question in his prison letters, viz., who is Christ for us today?

It has become apparent in this chapter that Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Letters and Papers*

from Prison had some limitations in unfolding his theology and Christology, and the letters contain only one explicit reference to the ‘two natures’ of Christ. The one particular letter addressed to Bethge that conveys ideas on the ‘two natures’ of Christ is dated July 21, 1944, and concerns itself with the *cantus firmus*. Bonhoeffer describes the *cantus firmus* as clear and distinct so that a counterpart can develop as mightily as it wants. The two, the *cantus firmus* and the counterpart, are ‘undivided and yet distinct,’ as the definition of Chalcedon says, like the divine and human natures in Christ. The Chalcedon definition maintained that Jesus Christ was (and is) both divine and human and that his ‘two natures’ did not ‘mix’ but were joined together in a mysterious, hypostatic union (see DBWE 8:394).

Bonhoeffer’s concern for the church was real while writing the prison letters; he continually asked, ‘Who is Jesus Christ for us today?’ Alternatively, ‘How is the presence of Christ to be seen in the church community today?’ ‘How does he exist?’ These all became Christological questions that find their meaning in the church community where Christ exists as both human and divine. For Bonhoeffer, living as the God-human becomes imperative, particularly during a religionless time where the presence of Christ has to be seen and exist as the church community for others.

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Chapter 10 The Development of Bonhoeffer's Christology – The 'two natures' of Christ in his books

10.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a summary of the development of Bonhoeffer's Christology, on the 'two natures' of Christ, as explored in six of his significant writings examined in this study. In this chapter, I will clarify whether one could determine a shift in Bonhoeffer's theology and Christology from his earlier until his posthumous writing, especially in his case of his Christology, viz., on the 'two natures' of Christ (the God-human). I will clarify whether he retained continuity throughout his corpus. In this chapter, I hope to establish whether further development of Bonhoeffer's traditional Lutheran understanding of the person of Christ was found in his earlier and posthumous writings. I will then explain Bonhoeffer's perception of Lutheran theology, and also discuss his engagement with certain Lutheran doctrines, especially Christology, as found in his corpus.

Bonhoeffer often agrees with Luther's criticism of Christianity yet from a different perspective, yet it would be accurate to say that Bonhoeffer's theology and Christology remain predominantly Lutheran. He maintains a Lutheran Christology, or at least partially, but also repeatedly diverges from Luther's interpretation of Scripture, his theology, and Christology. I will discuss five Lutheran aspects that are typical of Bonhoeffer's corpus in the sequence of the 'two natures' of Christ; the theology of revelation; the concept of *Stellvertretung*; the two realms concept; and the idea of the 'real presence' of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper in the community-of-faith.

On the 'two natures' of Christ, Bonhoeffer follows the Lutheran tradition, which maintains that the finite can contain the infinite (*finitum capax infiniti*). This idea *finitum capax infiniti*, which refers to God's incarnation through the birth of Jesus Christ, remains central to Bonhoeffer's theology in *Sanctorum Communio*, and he also develops this extensively in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Bonhoeffer adhered to the Chalcedonian formulation of the 'two natures' of Christ. Therefore, he could claim that Jesus was both human and divine – Christ is the revelation of God as a human-God.

Regarding the theology of revelation, Bonhoeffer often alludes to Luther's *theologia crucis* at the same time about the theology of revelation, viz., that God is revealed through the humiliation and shame of the cross. For Bonhoeffer, God revealed Himself through the cross, and therefore God is known through the suffering on the cross. This concept seems atypical because Bonhoeffer uses it in his writings about suffering concerning Christianity. Christians are called to participate in God's suffering just as Christ suffered in his humanness, which means Christians, too, are called to participate in His humanness and endure suffering. For Bonhoeffer, the only God Christians know and should confess is the human being Jesus (the revelation of the God-human), who was born, who suffered, and who died for us. Bonhoeffer expounds this type of Christology in his *Christology* and later writings.

In secondary scholarship, Bonhoeffer's concept *Stellvertretung*¹⁰⁰ is often referred to as the substance and sum of his theology and Christology. With this concept, Bonhoeffer demonstrates his liberty to depart from the Lutheran interpretation. *Stellvertretung* translates into the theme of 'vicarious representative action' in Bonhoeffer's corpus, which Bonhoeffer develops, especially in *Sanctorum Communio*. *Stellvertretung* has to do with the exercise of relationships between Christ and the church for whom Christ dies. It is assumed that Bonhoeffer believes that *Stellvertretung* means Jesus took on the responsibility for humanity's salvation by becoming human. This theme 'vicarious representative action' contains Bonhoeffer's leitmotif of sociality as a whole; that is, Christ became the human for others. The sociality of the church is defined by what Bonhoeffer calls *Stellvertretung*, which involves acting responsibly on behalf of others. This anthropological analogy is an idea that Bonhoeffer develops throughout his *Sanctorum Communio*.

Luther's discussion on the two realms concept becomes pivotal in understanding Bonhoeffer's reluctance to accept Luther's kind of thinking in his *Ethics*. Luther's two realm thinking held that two distinct kingdoms exist, the kingdom of Christ (as the kingdom of forgiveness) and the kingdom of the devil. Luther meant that as the wicked are in the power of the devil, they become members of the kingdom of the devil. Luther stressed that these two kingdoms are in

¹⁰⁰ *Stellvertretung* is often translated as 'substitution' or 'replacement'.

no way interrelated and cannot co-exist. Bonhoeffer chose to engage Luther's two kingdoms theme directly, highlighting in *Ethics*, writing that there is only one realm, the Christ-reality (*Christuswirklichkeit*). For Bonhoeffer, the one reality Christians need to be concerned with is God's reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world, and the world cannot be conceived of as two kingdoms. Bonhoeffer scholars deduce that Bonhoeffer's rejection of Luther's two kingdoms concept clearly expresses Bonhoeffer's incarnational theology. Bonhoeffer placed Christ at the centre of these two kingdoms (realities), thereby revealing that Christ held together both the world's reality and Christ's reality – they are not separate but held together by Christ. Bonhoeffer also concurred with the Lutheran idea of the 'real presence' of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Regarding the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Lutherans believe that the real presence of the body of Jesus Christ is in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This meant that Christ was present when the bread and the wine were consumed during the Lord's Supper – Christ is really present spiritually and as a human in the sacrament. It would be accurate to assume that at the heart of Lutheran Christology was their view on the Lord's Supper. In the Declaration of the Lutheran Estate, it was affirmed that,

The Tenth Article has been approved, in which we confess that we believe, that in the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present, and are truly tendered, with those things which are seen, bread and wine to those who receive the Sacrament (*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* 1530).

Rather than maintaining an autonomous line of thought, Lutherans adopted the concept *communicatio idiomatum* (the communication of properties), which becomes central in their understanding of the Lord's Supper. Bonhoeffer adopted this idea, *communicatio idiomatum*, which he often refers to as a Christological idea about the interaction between humanity and deity in the person of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer concedes that this interaction is representative of the real presence of the body of Christ whenever the Lord's Supper is administered in the church community. On this basis, Bonhoeffer states that Christ's body shares in the attributes of God's divine nature; therefore, Christ is capable of being present everywhere and anytime where He wishes to be. In this instance, Jesus is really present in the Lord's Supper in the church community. The Formula of Concord confirmed that,

The Lord's Supper penetratingly assures and confirms that Christ ... in the nature

according to which he has flesh and blood, wants to be with us, to dwell in us, to work in us and to exert his power for us (Formula of Concord, 631).

The discussion of Bonhoeffer's Lutheran Christology sets the stage for a final investigation into Bonhoeffer's corpus. The arguments on Bonhoeffer's Christology were drawn from conclusions derived from the six books examined in this study, since the focus of the research was general one aspect of his Christology, namely, his view of the 'two natures' of Christ. The goal of this study was to highlight how Bonhoeffer integrated and interpreted the Chalcedonian definition in his books, which allowed him to develop his understanding of the 'two natures' of Christ. We assume that Bonhoeffer understood the 'two natures' of Christ within the context of the relationship that exists between God and Jesus Christ, particularly the reality of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, who lives as the God-human (i.e., 'who' Christ really is).

10.2 Overview of Bonhoeffer's Development of the 'two natures' of Christ in 6 major works

Unlike Bonhoeffer's *Christology* and posthumous *Ethics* that is filled with balanced references to both the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, *Sanctorum Communio* abounds with implicit intimations of Jesus Christ existing in the church community as the God-human. In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer presents Christ as present only in the church, i.e., 'Christ exists as church community' (see DBWE 1:138); Bonhoeffer scholarship has suggested that his Christology in *Sanctorum Communio* is simultaneously incarnational and communal.

Another aspect of Christ existing as the God-human presented by Bonhoeffer in *Sanctorum Communio* is Christ's suffering (an action that Jesus Christ took on behalf of humanity (*Stellvertretung*)). Bonhoeffer often uses this idea that is embedded in Christology in *Sanctorum Communio* to refer to Christ, taking responsibility for humanity through his suffering (see DBWE 1:120). Jesus accepted the suffering, to be exact, revealing the God become human, (revelation of God-human) and suffered as a curse for humanity. The two aspects, 'Christ existing as church community' and 'vicarious representative action' [*Stellvertretung*], I maintained in this study, are related to Bonhoeffer's Christology in *Sanctorum Communio*. Bonhoeffer develops these concepts in relation to the 'two natures' of Christ. When he speaks about 'Christ existing as a church community,' it has to do with Christ's humanity. For

Bonhoeffer, the God from the outside turns to us, humans (*deus extra nos, pro nobis*) through the person Jesus Christ, the God-human. Bonhoeffer expounds this notion of the divine becoming human and existing in the church community in *Sanctorum Communio*. For Bonhoeffer, it starts with the *sanctorum communio* (the community of the saints) where the God-human exists presently through the revelation of Christ, who exists in the community as the church – both divine and human, viz., the ‘two natures’ of Christ. Christ presently exists as a church community and is only present in the church as the God-human. In the same manner, when Bonhoeffer refers to the ‘vicarious representative action’ of Jesus Christ (*Stellvertretung*) it is interrelated to his Christology as developed in *Sanctorum Communio*, on the ‘two natures’ of Jesus Christ.

Bonhoeffer uses this phrase ‘vicarious representative action’ to develop the purpose of the salvific work of Christ, which brought into being the relationship between fallen human and the God-human; and paved the way to usher the new human into an empirical church and empirical reality. The ‘vicarious representative action’ establishes a relationship between humanity and God, which is found in the empirical church, the *sanctorum communio*. It is during this encounter with the God-human, in the community of saints, that Christians maintain and restore their relationships with each other; as they continually encounter the God-human through God’s ‘revelation’ in the church. I deduce that Bonhoeffer’s phrase, ‘vicarious representative action’ in *Sanctorum Communio*, is the substance and sum of his Christology. It is in Christ’s ‘vicarious representative action,’ that God restores community between Himself and humanity, in the church (see DBWE 1:157). It is in the empirical church community where Christ is revealed as both divine and human. For Bonhoeffer, by implication, Jesus’ whole life and suffering is vicarious representative action [*Stellvertretung*]. Jesus became human and stood in the place of all humans, taking responsibility for their sake in his incarnation. Besides, Jesus Christ stands in the place of all human beings because He suffered (see DBWE 6:231).

Throughout the book of *Sanctorum Communio*, the church is the body of the Christ in which the God-human exists. Categorically in *Sanctorum Communio*, the church becomes the divine reality of God through the revelation of Christ – nothing more, nothing less. Therefore, it would

be accurate to infer that in *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer's expressions on the 'two natures' of Christ are related to God becoming human through the revelation of Christ, the God-human in the church community.

Most of the themes in *Sanctorum Communio* are carried over into *Act and Being*. Generally, Bonhoeffer scholars infer that *Act and Being* is an alluded conversation between Bonhoeffer and Hegel on the meaning of the incarnation. The most prominent idea that Bonhoeffer puts forth is (God's) 'revelation' (God's becoming human). He often stresses that the church becomes the mode of revelation (where God's revelation takes place), thus making God 'haveable' – God became human. Bonhoeffer holds that God revealed His divine self in the church as a person in Jesus Christ, the God who became human. The church is the community of faith, and God's final revelation is 'Christ existing as a community,' that is, Christ existing in the church as the God-human (see DBWE 2:112-113). I propose that although *Act and Being* are concerned with the influence of transcendental philosophy on Protestant theology, the dialectic of *Act and Being* is one of faith and community. In essence, one cannot exist without the other. Bonhoeffer places a high value on faith and community in *Act and Being* by accentuating that God's Word becomes His revelation for us as the God-human.

Also, in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer's refers to the 'haveable' God who entered human history (graspable in the Word within the church) as the church community being 'visible concretely' and as the 'being of revelation.' The church is where Christ 'exists as a community,' and the 'revelation preached to us of God in Christ, the divine triune person' are all expressions of God becoming human in Christ and existing in the church community as both human and divine. These expressions also explain God's freedom to be bound up and placed at the disposal of human beings by entering into human history through Jesus –and becoming available through Christ (who existed with the triune God), the God-human who is 'visible concretely' in the church community. Presumably, the expressions mentioned above in *Act and Being* indicate Bonhoeffer's interpretation of how the triune God chose to reveal himself through Christ.

Unlike *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer's *Christology* lectures are probably the easiest to read and understand because they are set out as a treatise to defend the 'two natures' of Christ. The

whole argument of the *Christology* lectures is leveled against inadequate (negative) Christologies mentioned in his lectures that led Bonhoeffer to defend the fundamental Chalcedonian Definition of 451, which described Jesus Christ as the same Christ in ‘two natures,’ without confusion and without change, without division and without separation.

The *Christology* lectures in my estimation can be summarised as a balanced view of Bonhoeffer’s Christology. The lectures take as the starting point the God-human who exists as both divine and human, the one who ‘becomes the centre of knowledge’; the Word who became flesh; and a ‘human person [Jesus Christ] who is [also] the transcendent [one]’ (see DBWE 12:301,312,313). Christ is the God who became fully human. So, for Bonhoeffer, if we point to Christology as the centre of knowledge, it looks to none other than to the transcendent God who became fully human. In Bonhoeffer’s *Christology*, the transcendence of Jesus is the aspect of His nature or power that is wholly independent of the material universe, therefore referring to his divinity. Thus I postulate that in *Christology* Bonhoeffer’s Christology balances particularly on how he understands the person of Christ – viz., as having ‘two natures’; he does not over-emphasise the one above the other. This presents an affirmation of the Nicene confession that Jesus Christ is Lord, that he is indeed ‘truly God’ and ‘of one being with the Father.’ Bonhoeffer reconciled his disclosure of the divinity of Christ by adhering to the formulation of the Council of Chalcedon, i.e., Jesus Christ has ‘two natures’ and yet also ‘one person.’ Bonhoeffer’s ‘two natures’ theme is used interchangeably within his *Christology* lectures: this human being, Jesus Christ, he is God and human (see DBWE 12:354).

In the *Christology* lectures, the word Bonhoeffer chooses to use about the God-human is *menschgeworden* above *menschwerdung*. The word he chooses echoes his Christology more definitively, viz., reflecting the ‘two natures’ of Christ. The word *menschgeworden*, as used by Bonhoeffer, includes not only the concept of the human-God but also that of God taking on our flesh, that is, our full humanity. If this is true of God, took on our humanity, then it is true of Jesus, too, that he was not only fully divine but also fully human.

Further development of Bonhoeffer’s Christological thought on the ‘two natures’ of Christ, can be traced back to his *Discipleship*. In his oeuvre, Bonhoeffer is concerned mostly with ‘what

Jesus Christ himself would want of us,' the church. This idea he unpacks in a manner relating to the concept of the God who became human. Bonhoeffer's closest friend theorised that *Discipleship* was the first authentic unfolding of Bonhoeffer's Christological ideas as developed in both *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. In *Discipleship*, the words 'incarnation' and 'the incarnate' occur interchangeably and repeatedly, giving an apparent intimation that the book has to do with the living, incarnate Christ – the God who became human. This idea resonates throughout the book amidst the hyperbolic references to the *Sermon on the Mount* for discipleship. Again, as in his earlier writings, in *Discipleship*, the theme of God's becoming human, translates into the body of Christ, the church community. Bonhoeffer held that the idea that Christ exists in the church community is grounded in the incarnation – wherein the church God exists as a human. There remains one problem for theology and Christians in *Discipleship*: How does the church community show the world that Christ is truly present, actual, and accessible for humans in the world and church? For Bonhoeffer, 'Christ's presence' becomes relevant throughout the ages for Christians in His church, only if the church responds in obedience to the call of discipleship. Bonhoeffer resounds: Christ is present with us today, in bodily form, and if Christians heed His call to discipleship, they need to hear it where Christ himself is present – the church (see DBWE 4:201-202). This then becomes the central message in *Discipleship*, that the body of Christ needs to become visible as the church community just as Christ's body took up space on this earth. Irrevocably, Christians become the incarnate—the God who became human.

From the above discussion, one can assume Bonhoeffer considers the only way the church community can engage the world is by appropriating the concreteness of the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth. This occurs in the church and disciples' lives – that is, the incarnation of the God who became human has to take form in the individual's life and the life of the new community. Through faith, this new community comes to know the incarnate One as the 'body of God incarnate' who, in turn, then becomes the visible body by assuming the form of the church community. This is the human attachment of Jesus Christ to the church community; Christ dwells within it bodily. This is how the church community can live today, as the Christ, the

God who became human.

In *Discipleship*, the expression 'Jesus as the incarnate One' is understood with reference to the form of Christ. Bonhoeffer maintains that the form in which Jesus was revealed represents the form of God who chose to reveal Himself as having become human, therefore reminiscent of the 'two natures' of Christ. Bonhoeffer develops the expression of the 'incarnate One' in several ways in *Discipleship*: incarnation as grace; incarnation as righteousness; and incarnation as the church community, all expressions symbolic of Jesus' ministry as the God who became human. In sum, in *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer's starting point for Christology is always that the Son of God, the Logos becomes a human being revealed as the God who became human. Similarly, Bonhoeffer emphasises that Jesus existed in the form of God, as well as God took on humanity and came to earth. The Logos, Jesus Christ, took on the characteristics of humanity, its human qualities, human nature, sinful flesh, and human form (see DBWE 4:214).

Bonhoeffer's experiences in Finkenwalde and his involvement in the resistance against Nazism affected the theology in his posthumous texts, *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Another source of influence was the political turmoil in Germany and the church's toleration of injustices inflicted by Nazism. Despite this, the Bonhoeffer of *Ethics* remained very Christocentric. However, in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer tends to emphasize only the human nature of Christ. This tendency arises from his contemplation of 'reality,' particularly the reality of God as understood in relation to Christ's reality. For Bonhoeffer, Christ is God's reality (that is, God becoming human). He elaborates on God's reality in *Ethics* in several ways. God is the ultimate reality as the self-revealing God in Christ; Christ is God's reality, the concrete sum of God's self-revelation; and the reality of the church of Christ is given in 'God's self-revelation' in Christ. These ideas are all related to Bonhoeffer's notion of *mensch* and *Menschwerdung* (God becoming human), which is ever-present throughout the tenor of *Ethics*. Bonhoeffer's emphasis is never on the divinity of God, but on the human aspect (person) of Jesus Christ – an important tenet for the life of the disciple and church community, concerning their conduct within different aspects of society. The humanity of Jesus Christ becomes visible in the community, where God becomes one with all humanity. This does not mean when the concept

of the body of Christ is transferred to the church community that the church community is first and foremost set apart from the world. God becoming flesh in Christ presents the body of Christ to all humanity.

Therefore, the church community must make this known to the world. For Bonhoeffer, this means that Christians call the world ‘into the community [*Gemeinschaft*] of the body of Christ to which the world in truth already belongs’ (see DBWE 6:67). The church, as the incarnate therefore becomes the ambassador of the incarnate Son (God-human). Bonhoeffer scholars often propose that in *Ethics* Bonhoeffer’s focus on Jesus Christ’s nature signifies continuity in his theology on God becoming human, and this aspect becomes particularly apparent in his posthumous writings. Bonhoeffer asserts that the message be understood of the church to the world as no other than the Word of God; the *word about the coming of God in the flesh*. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer uniquely expresses his Christology: Christ becomes the reality of God, and the reality of God is the revelation of God through Jesus Christ; that is, God’s self-revelation manifests by becoming *mensch*. This is a clear indication that Bonhoeffer adheres to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ in *Ethics*, persisting in the idea that continuity exists between God and Jesus Christ’s nature. Hence, God, the divine and Jesus, the human come together to form one person and exist not as separate beings. In effect, in this, the person of Jesus Christ is perceived in ‘two natures,’ without confusion and without division – Christ exists as both human and divine, as expressed in the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ.

In Bonhoeffer’s writings, there are only three references to the ‘two natures’ of Christ, of which two are found in *Sanctorum Communio* (see DBWE 1: footnote [11.] SC-A, 110, footnote 142). Like Bonhoeffer’s earlier writings, in the posthumous *Letters and Papers from Prison*, his Christology has some limitations. In essence, there is only one explicit reference to the ‘two natures’ of Christ, in a letter to Bethge dated May 21, 1944. The posthumous *Letters and Papers from Prison* are complex and therefore challenging to use to piece together Bonhoeffer’s theology and Christology about the ‘two natures’ of Christ. Also, it becomes almost impossible to determine a consistent trend of thought in the prison letters: since his

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.

in every calling what a life in Christ is, what it means ‘to be there for others’ like the Christ is ‘the being for others.’ The church will have to see that it does not underestimate the significance of the human ‘example’ which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus.

To conclude, the ecclesiology of *Letters and Papers from Prison* is defined by Christology; that is, the church is ‘the being for others,’ by living as ‘Christ existing as a community’ because Christ exists for others. For Bonhoeffer living a life for the God who became human becomes imperative for both the church and the individual, which articulates his theology on the ‘two natures’ of Christ in his prison letters.

10.3 Concluding Remarks

Based on the above summation of Bonhoeffer’s major books, the core task of this study was addressed, namely to trace the developments in Bonhoeffer’s theology on the ‘two natures’ of Christ, as expressed in his earlier and later writings. I maintain that there is a positive development in Bonhoeffer’s theology from his earlier writings, and not a shift away from his Christology. Bonhoeffer adhered to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ in his rather traditional Lutheran understanding of the person of Christ (the God who became human). The heart of Bonhoeffer’s Christology and theology has always been about the revelation of God through Christ. Contrary to expectations, although Bonhoeffer continually adhered to the Chalcedonian formulation of the ‘two natures’ of Christ, I did not find significant discussions converging on both the divine and human natures of Christ by Bonhoeffer in his major writings. In his corpus, he repeatedly emphasises the one aspect of the nature of Christ, that is, His humanness. The only time Bonhoeffer emphasises both the divine and human aspects of Christ is found and defined in his *Christology* lectures. Although Bonhoeffer’s notion of the divine is ever-present in his corpus, he seems to be more concerned to re-enact the divine aspect of God in the church community through the humanity of Jesus as the ‘the revelation of God’. The expression ‘the revelation of God’ frequently appears in his writings to refer to God by implication as to the One who became human and who becomes real (animate) when the church exists as the community of the revealed Christ.

Consequently, the question remains: How should Dietrich Bonhoeffer's views on the so-called 'two natures' of Christ be understood? Moreover, who is Jesus Christ for us today? I propose that Bonhoeffer's writings used in this study should be understood Christocentrically and that throughout his writings, his Christology remains Chalcedonian.

It would be plausible to assume that Bonhoeffer's writings, both early and posthumous, offer a one-sided Christocentric theology. He often speaks of the church as the community of Christ only in a Christocentric way. In answering the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" Bonhoeffer holds that Christ is the God who became human; and who is present in all the institutions of the church that are incorporated into its social tapestry. In fact, for Bonhoeffer, 'Christ, the God who became human, exists for others.' The church is 'present' in the world, as a community. It is in the presence of the church that Christ's transcendence (the God-human) is expressed, and exists in the church.

In his earlier and then later writings, Bonhoeffer's views on Christ's humanity always led him to ask fundamental Christological questions, such as, 'Who is God?', and 'Who is Jesus Christ?' Categorically, throughout Bonhoeffer's writings, when he asks about the 'who,' he also held that the 'who' question is related to Christ's identity, viz., about Christ's nature. The 'who' question is about the Christ of history, the whole Christ, who is asked about and who answers: I am the present Christ – I am the God who became human and exist as divine and human. To answer these Christological questions, Bonhoeffer would reply resoundingly: God is Christ in the human form, Jesus is the God who became human. Jesus is the God-human. I maintain that the questions, as mentioned earlier in Bonhoeffer's corpus, became the theme that held together his theology and which epitomise Bonhoeffer's adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation of the 'two natures' of Christ in both his earlier and posthumous writings.

Chapter 11 Epilogue

11.1 The Significance of this study on Bonhoeffer's Christology, viz., the 'two natures' of Christ

Although Christology is an apparent central theme in Bonhoeffer's oeuvre, in this dissertation I had to pay more attention to the primary goal of this study by answering one particular question, that is, does a continuity or a discontinuity exist in Bonhoeffer's understanding of the 'two natures' of Christ? The overall answer in both secondary scholarship and Bonhoeffer's corpus to this question was surprisingly definite. However, in secondary literature, there seems to be no clear general definition nor discussion on the 'two natures' of Christ. On the contrary, Bonhoeffer's *Christology* does contain a clear explanation of the 'two natures' of Christ. I believe in this study, and I answered the questions of continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's thought and theology as found in his corpus. Considering that I have responded to these questions and substantiated previous findings in the secondary literature regarding Bonhoeffer's Christology, the following should be taken into consideration: what is the significance of the 'two natures' question and what does that say about the state of Bonhoeffer's scholarship on his Christology? In examining secondary scholarship, the single most striking observation that emerges is the lack of attention to Bonhoeffer's adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation of the 'two natures' of Christ. More attention is given to his shift from his early theology to later theology and research as to where this shift occurred.

The main weakness in secondary scholarly research is that one crucial aspect of Christology is overlooked, namely, the 'two natures' of Christ. There has often been the tendency to conceptualise Bonhoeffer for various contexts, like humanism, ethics, public theology, and politics. In the research of Feil, a prolific writer on Bonhoeffer's theology, the focus tended to be on a historical survey of Bonhoeffer's Christology and the hermeneutical point of departure in Bonhoeffer's theology. In this, Feil focuses solely on Christology and not much attention, if any is given to the 'two natures' of Christ. Bethge, a personal friend and an authority on interpreting Bonhoeffer's corpus, spent much time exploring Bonhoeffer's life and theology by tracing the development of his life, leaving us with an extraordinary biography. Also, in a

significant advance in 1999, Bonhoeffer scholars authored the *Cambridge Companion to Bonhoeffer*; they wrote prolifically on Bonhoeffer's life and legacy with many impressive attempts to envelop all of the major theological themes in his writings. Their preliminary work on Bonhoeffer's research focused on topics like human sociality, themes found in the *Letters and Papers from Prison*, the relationship of the church to state, and ethics. In recent years there has been considerable interest in making Bonhoeffer's theology relevant (not so much his Christology). These researchers studied and analysed Bonhoeffer's theology choosing themes concurrent with their contemporary theology.

I have noted that South African Bonhoeffer scholars adopted popular themes such as public theology; and often engaged Bonhoeffer's theology on a more fundamental level, and usually on a Christological level than merely a contextual level. It must be noted, that this study did not deal with the relevance of Bonhoeffer's Christology *specifically* for South Africa but served as a more general overview of the reception of Bonhoeffer's theology in South Africa. More so this thesis focussed on the understanding and study in terms of Bonhoeffer's Christology in South African studies on one aspect of Bonhoeffer's Christology, viz., the 'two natures' of Christ; and this characteristic become important in assessing the originality of this study.

The state of Bonhoeffer scholarship, in general, seems to be focused contextually and is still spiralling at Bonhoeffer conferences where specific current, relevant historical themes, and theologies are studied and discussed. Not much attention is paid to areas focusing on continuity and discontinuity found in his theology. An unintended bias cannot be ruled out that this too has not been my primary focus in this paper. I did not work on continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theology in general. I wrote about it in detail in Chapter Two and occasionally explored continuity and discontinuity in relation to Bonhoeffer's posthumous corpus. However, I only focused on the Christology in Bonhoeffer's writings and not only his Christology but, more so, his views on the 'two natures' of Christ.

Given the focus, as mentioned earlier, I cannot definitively answer the question of continuity and discontinuity. Still, I can make known what I have learned about Bonhoeffer's views on the 'two natures' of Christ in the six significant writings that I have examined.

First, I learned how and where we need to modify our understanding of the issue of continuity and discontinuity and, subsequently, on Bonhoeffer's theology in general, and more specifically, on his Christology. This has not been the focus in secondary scholarship, which is the reason that not much research has been conducted on Bonhoeffer's views on the 'two natures' of Christ. Otherwise, such a focus was limited to the context of Bonhoeffer's *Christology* lectures. This was true of both Russell Palmer and Charles Hegarty. Their studies remain within the meaning of Christological heresies and negative Christology, as discussed by Bonhoeffer in his *Christology* lectures. Nothing new emerges from their research beyond a simple elaboration of the Chalcedonian definition.

The most incisive in-depth research on Bonhoeffer's views on the 'two natures' is by Nissen, who suggests that the notion of reality plays a central role in the ethical implications of the Chalcedonian definition. Nissen's assumptions seem plausible when he draws attention to Bonhoeffer's understanding of reality, implying that in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer's mode of thought remains Chalcedonian. Nissen concludes that just as the 'two natures' of Christ are 'without division,' and 'the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union,' the reality of the world and the reality of Christ are 'without division' and yet in no way detached from each other.

In South Africa, secondary scholarship's main contribution to Bonhoeffer research was mainly political – which was relevant then – but now holds many limitations. Current South African Bonhoeffer scholarship bears a close resemblance to the scholars mentioned above. The research in South Africa is still reminiscent of the role allocated to Bonhoeffer as a prophet and role model. The closest we get to related research is by Robert Vosloo, who discusses the gift of 'participation' through Christ in a triune life. Vosloo explores relating the doctrine of the Trinity to the Christian moral life; and Christians' experience in the church community wherein Christ exists as both human and divine, hence the 'two natures' of Christ.

The main weakness of these secondary scholar's approaches was that they did not attempt to address Bonhoeffer's views, specifically on the 'two natures' of Christ, beyond the background of past-to-present literature. This meant that recent years saw considerable interest in exploring

new ideas in interpreting Bonhoeffer's Christology. Still, contemporary literature is mainly based on areas of specialization. Therefore, this study contributed to the current discourse (if any exists) on the 'two natures' of Christ; that is, Bonhoeffer's major writings that I examined.

Bonhoeffer's major writings bear strong evidence that he preserved his Lutheran heritage and upheld his adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation of the 'two natures' of Christ. This highlights just how vital the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon of 451 was to Bonhoeffer. My research aimed to broaden current knowledge of Bonhoeffer's Christology, not so much his Christology but his view on the 'two natures' of Christ.

Christology is an apparent central theme in Bonhoeffer's oeuvre. It would make more sense to assess his Christology, viz., his view on the 'two natures' of Christ in retrospect proceeding from his prison writings. It would make sense since much research has gone into determining whether there is continuity between his later theology found in his prison letters and his earlier theology. We had to decide whether his theology and Christology had changed while he was in prison, or whether he adhered to the Chalcedonian formulation of the 'two natures' of Christ. Reconsidering Bonhoeffer's Christology briefly in retrospect proceeding from his prison writings allows a better assessment of the issue of continuity. From the onset of involvement with church and as seen in the dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer confessed concern for the welfare of the church. This pressing concern for the church gives us some insight to his expressions of an animate Christology. These expressions emerge in the questions, 'What is Christianity?' Or 'Who is Jesus Christ actually for us today?' These Christological questions reveal Bonhoeffer's theological thought long after his academic experiences had lapsed while he was in prison. It becomes evident that at this time in his theological journey, he was not so much concerned about the mediocrities of life but rather the reality of the revelation of Jesus Christ existing as the God who became human and entered into the world and continues to exist in the church community. Bonhoeffer's concern remains the same as in his other major writings, even in his posthumous *Ethics*, namely that the reality of God has to be acted out within the community of Christ – the church community.

In attempting to summarise Bonhoeffer's Christology as found in his corpus, although I

concerned myself with debates and hermeneutics as to what Bonhoeffer meant by ‘a religionless Christianity’, my focus also shifted to Bonhoeffer’s Christocentric concern for a lethargic church. Bethge assumes that the heart of Bonhoeffer’s theology from beginning to end always remained the message of the God who became human (*menschgeworden*) – “The incarnate God is the only one we know” [or Bonhoeffer knew] (see Bethge 1961:34). We cannot just assume that this held throughout Bonhoeffer’s theological journey – hence this study. I have learned that Bonhoeffer’s major writings show no apparent shift in Christology from his earlier writings to the prison letters; continuity exists. My research has also demonstrated how Bonhoeffer’s Christology evolves, always based on Chalcedon – Bonhoeffer’s “positive Christology” is premised on the “negative or critical Christology” of the Nicene tradition. Bonhoeffer preserved both his Lutheran heritage and his adherence to the Chalcedonian formulation on the ‘two natures’ of Christ – Jesus was both human and divine and existed in the church community just so.

The need for this study on Bonhoeffer’s Christology on the ‘two natures’ of Christ became apparent for the following reasons. Firstly, I found that secondary scholarship adopted many different views regarding Bonhoeffer’s Christology, ecclesiology, and continuity and discontinuity between his early and later writings. After that, it became necessary for me to strip off the layers of scholarly debate and focus on one aspect of Bonhoeffer’s Christology, viz. the ‘two natures’ of Christ. Lastly, I found that a critical problem with much of the literature about Bonhoeffer’s Christology was that it was contextualised for specific issues and specific audiences.

On the contrary, the following resonated throughout Bonhoeffer’s earlier and later writings. First, he consistently focused on one aspect of Christology, the ‘who’ question about the being of transcendence, the God who became human. Immediately following, he focused on how the present relevance of this kind of Christology – on the God who became human – can bring relevance to Christianity today. Bonhoeffer’s theology and concern about Christianity were not solely about religion, but rather concentrate on the person of Jesus Christ, the God who became human. On examination, one notices that the question, ‘Who is Jesus Christ?’ is woven

throughout his earlier and later writings.

Primarily for me, this study on Bonhoeffer's Christology, on the 'two natures' of Christ, became significant because the 'who' question allowed me to reframe our South African context. We should once again concern ourselves with the question as to what extent Bonhoeffer is still relevant for South Africa. We continually need to ask, 'Who is Jesus Christ for us today?' Bonhoeffer's call to the church in South Africa is still relevant today for the following reasons: God assumed human form and came to us. The Son of God 'who' existed in the form of God, emptied himself of his divine form and arrived in the form of a servant to us. What are we prepared to do? If we appropriate the idea of 'the form of a servant' we as the community of the Christ will comprehend entirely 'Who' the Christ is for us today: a servant who existed as both divine and human, whose form we need to assume in our present South Africa (see DBWE 8:362).



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