

## A new ethics for a new time? Rereading Bonhoeffer's 'Heritage and Decay'

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### Abstract

According to Bonhoeffer, responsibility is a global response of the human being to all reality as a whole. In the fragments of his posthumous *Ethics*, themes such as discipleship, culture, politics, human rights, and others converge to the same point. In this article, I analyse the context in which these fragments were written and expose the reason why even under the most difficult circumstances, Bonhoeffer thought and lived life responsibly as a whole according to what Karl Barth few years earlier called *Theological Existence*.

### Keywords

*formation (Gestaltung); civilization; West; past; future*

### Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was concerned about the coming generation during the difficult period of World War II. In this time, he set about producing what he considered to be the culmination of his life's work, *Ethics*, according to one of his letters from Tegel Prison. Published posthumously by his friend and biographer Eberhard Bethge, one of the fragments of *Ethics*, with the theme of *Heritage and Decay*, addresses the unfolding of historical events in the West that culminated in secularism of the 1930s. All the values of Christian civilization are called into question, including the values that shaped Bonhoeffer's own education during the Weimar Republic. The deconstruction of all reality around him deeply affected his personal and professional life. But because of the breadth of his formation and worldview (*Weltanschauung*), he saw in the midst of the social and political crisis of

his time the end of a period and the beginning of a new one, one in which he was interested in participating.

*Ethics* was edited by Eberhard Bethge and published in 1949. As Bethge recognizes in the preface of the book, it “is a compilation of the sections which have been preserved, some of them complete and others not, some already partly rewritten and some which have been committed to writing only as preliminary studies for the work which was planned.” The text of *Ethics* is an attempt to treat the great moral dilemmas imposed by war and the necessity to resist a criminal government. The nature of this work reflects not only the different initiations as regards the search for “foundations,” but also the many directions of its own work in the resistance against the Nazi regime. Chapter three argues that the rich spiritual heritage of the West, which has its origin in Christ, has fallen into decadence and that people should return to their origin, amidst this reality of anti-church godlessness. Such a return is a call to be a suffering church that considers “the total and exclusive Christ claim,” in this way becoming a body existing against the tyrannical despiser of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

## The crisis in the West and the recognition of the church’s guilt

Bonhoeffer believed that in the same way that the persecuted Christian is a picture of the crucified Jesus, the first victims of Nazi hate, the Jews, kept “open the question of Christ”.<sup>2</sup> Written in the beginning of the mass deportations of Jewish citizens from Berlin, Bonhoeffer in this fragment identifies the crucified Christ with the *sufferer*, the Jews. In Bonhoeffer’s words: “driving out the Jew(s) from the West must result in driving out Christ with them, for Jesus Christ was a Jew”<sup>3</sup> (from October 1941 to February 1945 about 50 000 Jews were deported from Berlin. While in 1933

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1 Cf. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6 (DBWE 6)*, ed. Clifford Green (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005), 103f. translation from the German edition, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke Band 6 eds. Ilse Tödt, Heinz Eduard Tödt, Ernst Feil and Clifford Green (Chr.Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1998)*, 93f. The footnotes and Afterword of *Ethics* edition of Bonhoeffer’s Works present a thorough research and analysis of the paper type, and the likely organization of the chapters that Bonhoeffer had in mind for the final edition of the book.

2 Cf. *DBWE 6:105 (DBW 6:96)*.

3 Cf. *DBWE 6:105 (DBW 6:96)*.

122 000 Jews lived in Berlin, in 1945 there were only 6000).<sup>4</sup> The section, *Guilt, Justification, Renewal*, made the confession that the church is not only guilty in the individuals who are part of it as a “collective person,” but as “a whole” for not defending the gospel. The church, wrote Bonhoeffer, is guilty of having witnessed “the arbitrary use of brutal force, the suffering in body and soul of countless innocent people, that it has witnessed oppression, hatred, and murder without raising its voice for the victims and without finding ways of rushing to help them.”<sup>5</sup>

In confessing the complicity of church with the Nazi holocaust, he declares that the church is “guilty of the lives of the weakest and most defenceless brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup> That is Bonhoeffer’s expression related to the Jews and imprisoned pastors. What is important to recognise is that this guilt confession was written while the German people celebrated their greatest military victory at the time, namely, the fall of France. While people enjoyed the new glory of Germany, Bonhoeffer particularly lamented the guilt of the church in the suffering inflicted by the Nazi Blitzkrieg and by the terrorist regiment in the occupied countries. But in the next section – *Guilt, Justification, Renewal* – he shows that the main goal is not only the recognition of guilt, but forgiveness and healing. He argues that the “justification and renewal” of the West can therefore only happen in the restoration of justice, order, and peace in one way or another and then by the “forgiveness” of past guilt. This means giving up any illusion that one can, by punishment, undo what has been done. It means giving space among the nations to the church of Jesus Christ, the origin of all forgiveness, justification, and renewal.<sup>7</sup> And the blame is not only on Germany, Bonhoeffer added: all powers in the West have, in many ways, taken part in this apostasy from Christ. And together they must participate in the healing which was the hope of those who share

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4 Cf. Booklet for the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Berlin-City-Tour, edited by the board of the *Bonhoeffer-Haus Erinnerungs und Begegnungsstätte* (Bonhoeffer-House Memorial and Place of Encounter) *Marienburger Alle 43-D-14055 Berlin – Charlottenburg* (1st English edition August, 2000), 11-12.

5 *DBWE* 6:139

6 Cf. *DBWE* 6:125f (DBW 6:134f), especially *DBWE* 6:138f (DBW 6:129f) where Bonhoeffer makes the confession of guilty. It follows the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:2-17). This quote is from *DBWE* 6:139.

7 Cf. *DBWE* 6:144f (DBW 6:136).

Bonhoeffer's view of Christian renewal. It is within this context of war, tyranny, and fascism – as well as the question of church's complicity – that we are to understand Bonhoeffer's turn towards developing a new ethics.

## A new ethics for new times

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a new ethics for a new time. One could say that it is an ethics without religiosity, according to the famous saying in the letters from prison. That is the reason why the impact of his ethics still remains with us today, who are also facing a universal disintegration of traditional cultures and ethics. Bonhoeffer consciously wrote his Ethics under the heightened sense of cultural and moral decline, which for him also reaffirmed Christian notions of sin and the ever-present reality of the fall. One of the literary works read by Bonhoeffer which is doubtlessly reflected in his *Ethics* was the book *The Decline of the West*, by the German historical philosopher, Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), written during World War I. Such perspective allows us to understand Bonhoeffer's ethic as a new beginning in the face of the total crisis Europe and the rest of the world experienced. The crisis was not evoked by National Socialism but found its final expression in it. His intention was to make clear that the Western crisis could be seen as a concrete expression of the crisis between God and humanity – which could be described as the fall within traditional Christian theological language. For Bonhoeffer, rather than just alluding to a primordial separation of God and humanity, the fall in fact appears in all times, under specific forms even as in this context it was dressed in the clothes of National Socialism. In addition to reading events in Germany through concepts of anthropological fallenness, one can also see how Bonhoeffer during this period made other analogies between biblical narratives and contemporary events in Germany – such as from the period of Israel's decline, overthrow, and eventual exile. In a letter that Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from London, on April 28th, 1934, to Erwin Sutz, a Swiss friend, he affirmed: “National Socialism has brought about the end of the church in Germany – we can be grateful, in the way the Jews had to be grateful to *Sennacherib*” (the Assyrian high king, who in 701 subjugated the kingdom of Judah and besieged Jerusalem under King *Hezekiah*).

## The form of Christ as opposed to Nazi Ideology

Before approaching this theme directly from its *Ethics*, it is important to note the continuity of the theme of Formation (*Gestaltung*) with his early theology, as expressed in his lectures on Christology at the beginning of the 1933 summer semester in Berlin.<sup>8</sup> In the first section of the lecture, under the theme “The Present Christ – *pro me*”, he deals with the Form of Christ – Christ as Word, Sacrament and Church-Community – as well as the concept of Christ as a person present in time and space, one who is present in history now (*nunc et hic*). This part of the lecture as well as the second section, “The historical Christ”, especially the themes “The One Who Became Human” and “The Humiliated and Exalted,” are in the background of his later classes at Finkenwalde and the book that summarizes the contents of these classes, namely Discipleship (*Nachfolge*) – and here particularly the last chapter, “The Image of Christ.”<sup>9</sup> In this chapter of *Discipleship* and in *Ethics as Formation*, Bonhoeffer speaks similarly about the form of Christ as consisting of three dimensions, Christ as the incarnate, crucified, and risen one.

In the preface to the sixth edition of *Ethics* (July 1962), Bethge says that the *Ethics* manuscripts are based on four approaches (I-Discipleship; II-Formation; III-Justification; IV-Incarnation), and this includes the topic *Heritage and Decay* in the second approach (*Ethics as formation*), here taking for granted that this manuscript was written on the farm in Klein Krössin (Kieckow) in September 1940,<sup>10</sup> and that there was a probability

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- 8 DBWE 12:299f (DBW12:279) – editorial note n.1 of this edition addresses the complex difficulty in reconstructing the text of these lectures, the source of which is Bonhoeffer’s student notes, comparing the present reconstruction with the earlier English translation published as *Christ the Center* (1966).
  - 9 DBWE 4:281f (DBW 4:297 f). Geoffrey Kelly one of the founders of the English language section of International Bonhoeffer Society, as editor of this volume of Bonhoeffer’s Works, writes in the Introduction to the English Edition: “the concluding chapter, ‘The Image of Christ’ deals with God’s incarnate presence in the church and in all ethical decisions[...]it reminds one of the concluding part of Bonhoeffer’s Christology lectures in the summer of 1933.”
  - 10 There is evidence of the writing of the *Heritage and Decay* manuscript that “begins on square-lined paper such as was used in the previous manuscript, *Ethics as Formation*”; DBWE 6:103 (DBW 6:94) editorial note 1.

that this was the order that the author had in mind to publish his work.<sup>11</sup> In 1943 Bonhoeffer explained in the draft of a letter to his interrogator in Tegel Prison, Dr. Manfred Roeder, that “it had been reported to me that there was some interest in church quarters in the fact that I was following my book on Discipleship with a treatise on a concrete evangelical ethic.” The German introduction of *Ethics* refers to the letters written by Bonhoeffer himself and by his father to Eberhard Bethge in which the *Ethics*-project is mentioned.<sup>12</sup>

This introduction helps us to see the connections between his work in Christology (during his academic period) with *Discipleship* (during the early Church Struggle), and his concrete ethics (in the midst of the reality of war and resistance). To oppose the theme *The Form of Christ* to Nazi Ideology of National Socialism, Bonhoeffer uses the Christological themes in another section closely linked to this, *Ethic as Formation*. Having as its starting point the Christian life in conformation with the three dimensions of the form (*Gestalt*) of Jesus Christ who is the incarnate, the crucified, and the resurrected Christ, he argues that to be conformed to the image of the incarnate one (*Menschgewordene*)<sup>13</sup> means to be really human before God. Here Bonhoeffer refuses the Nazi ideology in two aspects: the cult of heroes, the figure of a demigod, and the propaganda of an ideal type and National Socialism’s ideal of the Aryan – which was the intrinsic antisemitic part. The manifold riches of God’s creation are not violated here by a false uniformity, by forcing people to submit to an ideal, a type, or a particular image of the human. “The real human being is allowed to be in *freedom* the creature of the Creator”, Bonhoeffer affirms.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, to be conformed to the image of the crucified one means to be a human being

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11 However, through other evidence from the manuscripts, Appendix 2 of *DBWE* 6 shows that there were other possible reconstructions. There is no space to discuss them here; cf. *DBWE* 6:467F (DBW 6:12).

12 DBW 6:7fF; *DBWE* 16:417 (DBW 16:410); *DBWE* 8:181; 496 (DBW 8:188; 553).

13 In note n.96 of *DBWE* 6:96, it is written: “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.” This shows how far 1940s theologians were from the theology of the Fathers of the Church (e.g. Irenaeus) and the Reformers.

14 Cf. *DBWE* 6:92f (DBW 6:80f) and Clifford Green, *Bonhoeffer: Theology of Sociality* (rev. ed., Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 310-331.

judged by God, so as to live justified by grace. “One cannot raise oneself up above any other or set oneself before others as a model.” The cross is the limit to all power and human arrogance. This theme is also important in the *theology crucis* (*theology of the cross*) of *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Bonhoeffer learned that resistance to tyranny means to tread upon the path of suffering, including the acceptance of God’s judgment. Thirdly, being conformed to the resurrected one means to be a new human being before God. “New human beings live in the midst of death, are righteous in the midst of sin, and are new in the midst of the old.” In this theme, Bonhoeffer turns against those who leave a trail of destruction and ruin wherever they go. As the glory of Christ remains hidden, the new life of the disciple also remains hidden.

To recapitulate, the theme of the *incarnate one* is the opposite of scorn or the deification of the human being, or, as Bonhoeffer says in another section of ethics, it is opposed to the despiser/despising of humanity.<sup>15</sup> “The real human being is an object of God’s love.” The theme of the *crucified one* is the opposite of the success of the world and glorification of human power (especially as conceived by National Socialism), a success that justifies arbitrariness, illegal means, and contempt for the weak. And the theme of the *risen one* is the opposite of the “idolization of death”. As written in the section *Ethic as Formation*,

the miracle of Christ’s resurrection has overturned the idolization of death that rules among us [...] Nothing betrays this idolization of death more clearly than an era claims to build for eternity, and yet life in that era is worth nothing, when big words are spoken about new humanity, a new world, a new society that will be created and all this newness consists only in the annihilation of existing life.<sup>16</sup>

It is thus through a Christology of the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ that Bonhoeffer conceptualises his concrete form of evangelical ethics, one that points towards the form of humanity that is to be lived before God. This is done consciously in opposition to the mythological

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15 Cf. DBWE 6:82f (DBW 6:69f). In previous editions of *Ethics*, this section of *Ethics as formation* has the subtheme *Ecce homo* (Jn 19:5).

16 Cf. DBWE 6:91 (DBW 6:79).

and racializing ideology of Nazism. Moreover, as we will see in the next section, it is also counterposed to National Socialism's conception of biological and cultural heritage: here again, the heritage and unity of the Christian West is not to be found in some mythology of race but in the concrete form of Jesus Christ.

## Understanding the past to build a future

The murderous events that occurred in Europe between 1930 and 1945 reveal the decay of cultural heritage, religion, and morality of the West. Long before 1940, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was convinced that the West's traditional ethical systems were powerless to fight the evil of the times. While arguably being a thoroughly modern theologian, strongly influenced by the liberal tradition, Bonhoeffer did not reject the centuries-old historical and Christian tradition. He affirms in his *Ethics*: “the relation of the Western peoples to antiquity is positive and fundamental. Antiquity became an established form of life, especially in education and politics, the content of this form being Christian.”<sup>17</sup> To him “the source of Christian ethic is not the reality of *one's own self*, not the reality of the *world*, nor is it the reality of norms and values. It is the reality of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ.”<sup>18</sup>

As regards heritage, Bonhoeffer refers to it in two aspects: “So our own pre-Christian past remains with us by nature, as specie or, if one will, a race. It is not, and never can become, a historical heritage.” It was such pre-Christian past with its pagan elements of the *cult of race and the German ground* that was glorified by the Nazis. Bonhoeffer's point here seems to be that the concept of our common humanity, our nature, cannot be reduced to a particular “historical heritage”, for this is precisely part of the Nazi mythology. This is the one aspect. But the past thus considered by them was also the Christian past, and this is the other aspect. In this regard, one can speak of historical heritage in the Christian West. The concept of a historical heritage, bound to an awareness of temporality and resistant to all mythologizing, is only possible where thought, consciously or

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17 Cf. *DBWE* 6:106 (DBW 6:96).

18 Cf. *DBWE* 6:49 (DBW 6:33).



unconsciously, is determined by the entry of God into history at a definite place and time, in which God become human in Jesus Christ. The Unity of the West is not an idea, but a historical reality whose only foundation is Christ: Christ has made the West into a historical unit.

During the Middle-Ages, just after Constantine, there was strong clericalism in the Roman world which ended up forming Christian civilization. According to Bonhoeffer, this fact brought about the Western unit. Nevertheless, Christian civilization collapsed with the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation broke up the unity of faith,

[n]ot that Luther wanted it so. He was completely devoted to the true unity of the church. But he recognized, through the power of the biblical word, that the unity of the church can consist only in the living Jesus Christ in word and sacrament, and not in political power. Thereby he shattered the structure of the church founded on the Roman tradition. [...] There is only one church, the church of faith ruled by the word of Jesus Christ alone. This is the true Catholic Church that has never disappeared and is still concealed in the Church of Rome. It is the body of Christ – *corpus Christi*. It is the true unity of the West. The political unity of the West was not a burning issue for Luther. He believed that it was still maintained by the emperor.<sup>19</sup>

For this reason, the secularization process started. As he continues to argue:

Protestants found in a misunderstood Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms a liberation and sanctification of the world and the natural order. Government, reason, economy, and culture each claimed the right to autonomy, but in this autonomy understood themselves to be not at all at odds with Christianity. [...] On the Catholic side the process of secularization quickly became revolutionary, antichurch, even anti-Christian. Thus its first revolutionary outbreak occurred in Catholic France.<sup>20</sup>

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19 Cf. *DBWE* 6:111-113 (DBW 6:102).

20 *DBWE* 6:113-115.

According to Bonhoeffer, the French Revolution with its faith in progress, the cult of reason, cultural criticism, nationalism, and hostility against the church, was and still is the “symbol of modern West.”<sup>21</sup> Liberated ratio became “a working hypothesis”, and thus led to the incomparable rise of technology. The revolt of reason against the rule of the church and state and against the complicity of such was justified. At least “intellectual honesty in all things, including questions of faith was the great good of liberated ratio.”<sup>22</sup>

He observed that technology in western countries – which means a world marked by Christianity, especially through the Reformation – got a different view in relation to eastern countries. While in the latter technology has been at the service of faith, in the first technology has become an end itself. “Its symbol is the machine, the embodiment of violation and the exploitation of nature.”<sup>23</sup> We have come to the point where modern western ethics has the theme of human self-sufficiency and has practical reason as the centre of the universe.

The centralization of faith, as in the Middle-Age and the Reformation, was abandoned in the moral horizon of modernity. “An unbridled vitalism arises, absorbing all values into itself and only finding peace in self-destruction, in nothingness [*Nichts*].”<sup>24</sup>

Yet in this chapter he talks about what was happening in the context of Europe as a whole. Nazism with their war machine and the intention of subduing all people brought with it the menace of “destruction” and “extermination”, things that had happened, have not happened since the pre-Christian past. “The West is about to repudiate its historical heritage. It is becoming hostile to Christ. This is the unique situation of our time, and it is actual decay.”<sup>25</sup> Some years later, Bonhoeffer enlarges his vision about the world’s secularization, concluding that to better understand the west’s emancipation process one must see it (envision it) from Christ.

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21 Cf. *DBWE* 6:114f (*DBW* 6:105f).

22 *DBWE* 6:115.

23 *DBWE* 6:116.

24 *DBWE* 6:123.

25 *DBWE* 6:132.

“[T]he world has come age is [...] now actually better understood than it understands itself, namely, from the gospel and from Christ,”<sup>26</sup> he wrote in the prison letters. The lordship of Jesus Christ is not a strange power to the world, but the presence of God as the world’s Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer. It is the lordship of he who is the origin, essence and goal of the world.<sup>27</sup> In these letters Bonhoeffer’s pessimism towards the world disappears in regard to western culture. Despite his affirmation of the world’s emancipation, he knew that the Lord rules.

Now we are able to better understand which destiny of Germany Bonhoeffer decided to participate in. It was not ‘his own people’, or even solidarity with the Confessing Church that was the main reason for his return to Germany, but the destiny of the Jewish people “the weakest and defenceless brothers of Jesus Christ”<sup>28</sup> to whom he refers in his confession of guilt. Without a theological conception of the closeness between Israel and the church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer probably would not have been able to develop this paradoxical form of ‘patriotism’. He affirms in *Heritage and Decay* that “Western history is by God’s will inextricably bound up with the people of Israel, not just genetically but in an honest, unceasing encounter.”<sup>29</sup> Despite the devastating consequences of war, Bonhoeffer during his time in the Tegel prison remained steadfast in his belief in a new future for the West and particularly for Germany. Although incarcerated, he kept himself well

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26 Cf. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 8 (DBWE 8)*, ed. John W. De Gruchy (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2010), 431; translation of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke Band 8 (DBW 8)*, eds. Eberhard Bethge et al (Chr.Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1998), 482. In this letter to Eberhard Bethge, dated June 8, 1944, Bonhoeffer develops a long section on the process of emancipation of the world and presents the challenges of this situation for the contemporary church.

27 In *Letters and Papers From Prison*, footnote n. 16, referring to the letter of June 8, quotes *Zettelnotizen*, 125 where Bonhoeffer characterizes Christian ethics as “liberation and claiming of the world and the humankind through Christ, the Reconciler, Creator, Redeemer and the Lord.” *Zettelnotizen* is an extensive collection of handwritten working notes, used by Bonhoeffer to organize his ethics. These notes consist of sketches, biblical quotes, names of authors and various works. There are one hundred and fifteen of these manuscripts, written on about forty different types of paper. Ilse Tödt, who found them very helpful in her work analyses the manuscripts and has retranscribed, ordered, annotated, and published them. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Zettelnotizen für eine “Ethik”*, ed. Ilse Tödt (Chr. Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1993).

28 DBWE 6:139 (DBW 6:130).

29 DBWE 6:105 (DBW 6:95).

informed by reading the newspapers, communicating with prison guards, and letters exchanged with family members - especially with Bethge. There are at least two quotes in the letters where he clearly expresses his belief in the reconstruction of Christian civilization in order to cooperate in this regard: “Our intensive experiences in the most harrowing aspects of war will, if we survive them, presumably provide the necessary experience for a rebuilding of the life of the peoples, internally and externally, that is only possible on the foundation of Christianity” (letter of November, 26, 1943 to E. Bethge).<sup>30</sup> “[T]he good things like justice, truth, beauty, all great achievements, need time and steadfastness, ‘memory, or else they degenerate. Anyone who doesn’t have the sense of a past to answer for and a future to plan for is ‘forgetful,’ and I don’t know where to take hold of such persons, challenge them, and bring them to their senses” (letter of February 1, 1944).<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to note that this last quote from the letter is then accompanied by the following statement: “It’s a big problem for Christian pastoral care.” This pastoral concern of Bonhoeffer shows the continuity of his academic and pastoral ministry, even after having engaged in the intricate and risky movement of the German resistance.

Bonhoeffer makes at least eight references in his prison letters to the period of illegal theological education of the Confessing Church of which he was the director, in regions in Pomerania – which included Finkenwalde, Schlönwitz and Sigurdshof. There are direct and sometimes indirect references to Finkenwalde, or sometimes in Latin about the way of life and the life together of that period – *vitas communis* – or the content of the theological study – *nova vita* – new life (he even quotes Finkenwalde twice when facing the possibility of dying; he draws up a Testament, and describes the objects he would like to leave, amongst others, a Bible and a picture of the Apostolos (by Albrecht Dürer) for Bethge and his fiancée, Maria von Wedemeier.<sup>32</sup> For five years (from autumn 1935 to 15 March,

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30 DBWE 8:201 (DBW 8:211).

31 DBWE 8:284 (DBW 8:310-311).

32 DBWE 8:159 (DBW 8:163); DBWE 8:194 (DBW 8:204); DBWE 8:201 (DBW 8:212); DBWE 8:218 (DBW 8: 232); DBWE 8:306 (DBW 8:336); DBWE 8:352 (DBW 8:390); DBWE 8:400 (DBW 8:448); DBWE 8:502 (DBW 8:559). In the time of Bonhoeffer’s New Testament Lecture at the Finkenwalde preacher’s seminary in the summer of 1936, New Life in Paul was one of subjects of the study plan; see DBWE 14:605 (DBW 14: 602).

1940) Bonhoeffer prepared/instructed ten separate groups of students from various locations that he eventually used for theological training.

Motivated mainly by Karl Barth and Barmen's theological statement, Dietrich committed himself during the Church Struggle (*Kirchenkampf*) to create a new form of Christianity, which stood against the Nazi hegemony. In a context where culture in general (press, radio, cinema, education, economics, and the armed forces) gave in to Nazi pressures, Barth, when commenting on the Barmen Declaration, stated that "the State cannot appropriate man in his entirety, you may not want to define the form and message of the church. If we recognize that, we must also confess it."<sup>33</sup>

Craig Slane describes Bonhoeffer's effort to train seminarians in the midst of all this culture of a new paganism as follows:

Nazism had imposed a largely ritualistic order on the Germanic people as a whole, using flags, pennants, uniforms, parades, films, music and strict military discipline, not to mention the consequent ritual murder. Hitler's *Weltanschauung* was not built solely on a political view. It was religious in the most pernicious sense imaginable. The mythical portrait of a paradisiacal state characterized by pure Aryan lineage, the idea of a "fall" linked in a very close way to the Jewish race, the idea of genetic reconstruction and glorious eschatological culmination of the Third Reich constituted a perverse *Heilsgeschichte*, in which Hitler ascended as the deified saviour of the German people. Contrary to the illness of this ritual, Bonhoeffer responded with the appropriate cure. In fact, compared to Benedictine and Franciscan rules, Finkenwalde's ritual order was anything but severe. In the context of German Protestantism, however, it was unique. In its illegality, it has become a type of liturgical-ritual resistance or perhaps even a liturgical betrayal. The true Church could not sustain itself morally by feeding itself on the sparse diet of weekly meetings. Its preservation would come through daily immersion in rituals and symbols that deeply inculcate the Christian point of view.<sup>34</sup>

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33 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/I* (Edinburgh: T&T, 1957), 172-175.

34 Craig Slane, *Bonhoeffer, o mártir* (São Paulo: Editora Vida, 2007) 376-377 (My translation into English Language from the Portuguese version).

I partially disagree with the emphasis that Slane places on “reform-liturgy” to which Bonhoeffer himself showed aversion to, which is evident in his criticism of the Berneuchen Movement, which he referred to among others as a movement of “dangerous reactionaries.”<sup>35</sup> In his request to the Council of the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union to get recognition for Bonhoeffer’s attempt to establish the Evangelical House of Brethren at the preachers seminary of Finkenwalde, which preserves the inner continuity of the sense of Christian brotherhood, he describes the form of community life of this brotherhood, stating, among other things, that “[t]he participants in the House of Brethren will live together and organize their days strictly according to worship. Rather than *ritual*, it will be the word of the Bible itself and prayer that will guide them through the day.”<sup>36</sup> Bethge’s observation in his biography on Bonhoeffer is significant, in view of the context marked by anti-Semitism, where he says: “supported by the House of Brethren, Bonhoeffer identified the seminary with the cause of persecuted colleagues, inviting pastor Willy Süßbach, a pastor of Jewish descent who had been beaten by the SA, to the seminary for a lengthy period of recovery; similarly also the pastor Johannes Pecina and Willi Brandenburg after their lengthy imprisonment.”<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusion

My goal is to continue research on *Ethics*, its relevance and the *modus operandi* that brings light to our time. More than two generations have passed since these fragments were written. In part, the healing of the

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35 DBWE 8:430 (DBW 8:482) A church reform movement begun in 1922 (see Das Berneuchen Buch, 1926) that aimed to form the church on the basis of “life” rather than “doctrine,” in the unity of *martyria* (witness), *leitourgia* (worship) and *diakonia* (service). In Finkenwalde’s homiletics lectures he stated: “The word (of God) alone make us unpardonable, not music and symbols (Berneuchen) – see DBWE 14:513 (DBW 14:507). The influence of Berneuchen movement on Maria von Wedemeyer “caused a bottleneck in the relation between Dietrich and Maria”; see *Love Letters from Cell 92: The Correspondence between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedermeyer*, edited by Ruth-Alice von Bismarck and Ulrich Kabitz (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 190, 262–64.

36 DBWE 14:97 (DBW 14:78).

37 Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (rev. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 539–540.

West became a reality after the Great War. But new conflicts have arisen, such as the 21 years of dictatorship in Latin America, a wave of terrorist attacks, particularly those that followed the September 11, 2001. These have generated a great expectance of fear around the world. The responsibility of the church to be a messenger of reconciliation and a guardian of the rich Christian tradition more than ever continues to be necessary. In the words of *Ethics as Formation*, the fact that “[t]he form of Christ is one and the same at all times and in it all places”<sup>38</sup> should help us to open our eyes to recognize Christ present here and now. As expressed by Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns in the preface of the report of the years of dictatorship in Latin America: “The image of God stamped on the human person, it is always one. Only this image can save and preserve the image of Brazil and the world.”<sup>39</sup>

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38 *DBWE* 6:98 (DBW 6:85).

39 *Um relato para a história: Brasil Nunca Mais* (Editora Vozes 1986), 13.

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