The Hermeneutics of Followship:

Relocating Narratives of Discipleship

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"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the acknowledgments."
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Abstract

The purpose of my thesis is to provide an examination of the praxis of discipleship. My aim, however, is not an objective study, as if such a thing were possible. It is my contention that it is only on the way with Christ that discipleship can ever be truly understood. My study is also not an appraisal of the institutions and practices of the church per se. Discipleship finds its genesis in the call of Christ. Instead, my focus is twofold: to develop a greater understanding of the way in which discipleship praxis is the legitimate response to the revelation of God found in Jesus Christ; and to identify an authentic hermeneutic of discipleship through which to interpret and engage the world. I introduce the term 'followship' as a descriptor for the primacy of 'following Christ' as the faithful response for Christian disciples.

In Part One of my study I undertake an examination of the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Through exegetical analysis of his major writings I identify a consistent hermeneutic which seeks to discover Christ already at work in the world as the Incarnate One, the Crucified One, and the Resurrected One. Bonhoeffer’s methodology, however, is intrinsically entwined with the story of his life. As 1930’s Germany descends into the chaos and evil of Hitler’s National Socialism, Bonhoeffer continually looks to the praxis of followship as the way of faithfulness and hope. In his later writings, Bonhoeffer hopes for a ‘religionless Christianity’ in order to bring good news to a world ‘come of age’.

The unorthodox terminology of Bonhoeffer’s later theology, and his desire for Christianity to rid itself of the shackles of institutional and cultural conformity, occasions the need to investigate the way language itself actually works. In Part Two of my study I turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein and introduce his concepts of language games and picture thinking. Wittgenstein’s theories also provide a foundation for my exploration of narrative via Paul Ricoeur, Don Cupitt, George Lindbeck and others. From this basis I then develop my own methodology of ‘narrative participation’ for the praxis of followship incorporating the work of Samuel Wells, Jürgen Moltmann, and Carl Braaten. Followship requires a
hermeneutic that can identify the story of Christ being told in the world and demands active participation in the story itself.

Part Three of my thesis explores the implications of my hermeneutic for a contemporary Australian context. By identifying the Incarnate One in Australian creative fiction and indigenous Dreaming, I am stipulating that God is already present in the stories we like to read and share. The Crucified One is revealed in the vilification of asylum seekers by Australian media outlets and demands a response from disciples. The Resurrected One is encountered in the personal testimonies of loss and hope disclosed by survivors of the Queensland floods of 2011.

My project is one that establishes a hermeneutic praxis for followship as narrative participation in Christ’s story of reconciliation in the world. The *Hermeneutics of Followship*, then, is offered as a contribution to the study of how disciples (followers) authenticate their faithfulness to the Lordship of Christ.
Shaping the Argument

Happy are those who know that discipleship simply means the life which springs from grace, and that grace simply means discipleship.¹

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.²

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the contemporary significance of ‘followship’ in an Australian context. The word ‘followship’ is a neologism; it is most obviously inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s seminal primer for Christian discipleship: Nachfolge (Following After).³ An exegetical analysis of Bonhoeffer’s writings will uncover a hermeneutic of followship that centres around his notion of the Incarnate One, the Crucified One and the Resurrected One. And it is this very hermeneutic that will hold together the various components of the thesis.

Our study of followship will be explored in conversation with a range of theologians and Biblical scholars from differing perspectives and disciplines, such as Stanley Hauerwas, Jürgen Moltmann, Carl Braaten, Susan Snyder and Amos Wilder. It will also include language philosophers from both the analytical and hermeneutical traditions such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Don Cupitt and Paul Ricoeur. It will conclude with the application of a hermeneutic

¹ Bonhoeffer, D., Nachfolge, Touchstone, New York, 1995, p. 56.
of followship for a contemporary Australian context engaging a diversity of

texts including the mythology of Aboriginal Dreaming, the creative fiction of

authors such as Henry Lawson and Tim Winton, media reporting of asylum

seekers, and personal narrative in response to natural disaster.

The word ‘followship’ finds its etymology in the word ‘discipleship’, which

obviously implies teaching and learning.\(^4\) In relation to the Christian faith,

however, it is also an imperative to follow the call of Christ. It is dynamic. It

involves action and movement; it is never static or inert. Followship then is

both a renaming of the word ‘discipleship’, and also a reminder of its

theological genesis. For followship is to be understood primarily as a

theological concept. It arises from the need to locate Christian theology ‘on

the way’ with Christ. In this way followship provides a hermeneutical lens

through which to reinterpret our understanding of the Christian faith and the

world in which we live.

It is important to note at this point that this thesis is not a study of followship;

that is to say, it is not a study of followers. It is a study of the act of following

itself. This act or performance, liturgically shaped by the faithful worship and

witness of the Body of Christ, is in itself a rehearsal of what Jesus calls the

Kingdom of God. The competence and characteristics of the performers may

vary with time and context, but the imperative to perform remains the same.

Samuel Wells\(^5\), Augusto Boal\(^6\) and others, insist that when a story is told well

it becomes a performance. And when a story is performed well it transforms

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4 The etymology of the word *discipleship* comes from the Old English *discipul* derived from

the Latin *discipulus* (pupil, student), and the Greek *μαθητής*.


the community in which it is told. It is this understanding of ‘discipleship as performance’ that Stanley Hauerwas sees in the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an exemplar of followship.\(^7\)

This study of the contemporary significance of followship is understood within the context of the current ‘here and now’.\(^8\) The ‘now’ represents a time when the life of followship is under pressure. With the demise of Christendom the role of the church has irreversibly changed. In today’s world followship seems archaic. The spiritual disciplines, ethical demands, and theological rigour associated with followship seem both alien and irrelevant. Western Society finds itself in a state of perpetual impermanence due to social and technological advances, resulting in the surprisingly paradoxical failure of secularism, alongside a somewhat resurgent supernaturalism.\(^9\) For while the analysis of recent census data shows that institutional forms of denominationalism are seen to be on the decline in places like Australia,\(^10\) these results need to be scrutinised alongside a phenomenon that Clive Pearson describes as a ‘religious resurgence’ and ‘religious awakening’ that appears to be happening in parallel.\(^11\) And so, even as atheist authors such as Richard Dawkins,\(^12\) Christopher Hitchkins,\(^13\) Sam Harris,\(^14\) and Phillip

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Adams\textsuperscript{15} are increasing their readership, contemporary pluralist societies are also augmenting their awareness and understanding of a variety of different faith traditions and spiritual practices. One of the great challenges for contemporary followers of Christ is to live faithfully in the midst of increasing cultural and religious diversity.\textsuperscript{16}

The ‘here’ in this study represents the location of Australia. It is a place far removed from the well-established centres of theological and philosophical enquiry. The chequered historical development of religion in Australia is one that has produced a somewhat reticent or even suspicious environment for theological dialogue. For Pearson, the idiosyncratic nature of the way Christianity has both arrived and evolved in the Australian context has been a defining feature.

From the outset organized religion was associated with authority and maintaining law and moral good order. The timing of the colonies was such that many of those who were relocated to Australia were already in the throes of being lost to an organized Christian faith through the dislocations caused by the industrial revolution and urbanization. There was no national church and no substantial equivalent of the religious colonies found in the United States or even, subsequently, across the Tasman Sea in Aotearoa New Zealand. It seems as if a kind of silence [or ‘shyness’] and perhaps suspicion about matters of faith was inculcated early into the life of this country and became part of what we might call the Australian imaginary.\textsuperscript{17}

This shyness of Australian spirituality and faith development has resulted in a surprising dearth of serious contextual theological scholarship and critique. In recent times, however, this has been redressed with publications examining matters of faith in relation to a variety of concerns, ranging from public policy through to the development of an authentic contextual spirituality. Tony Kelly describes Australians as ‘resolutely inarticulate’ about matters of spirituality and faith, and yet suggests that through mystical traditions such as the ‘practice of silence’ they may eventually find their theological voices. For even though ‘The Great South Land of the Holy Spirit’ is often considered one of the most irreligious places on earth, the reality is much more nuanced.

It is with this in mind that Gideon Goosen has sought to survey the ‘theological road’ thus travelled in order to better understand the journey that lies ahead. Goosen understands the importance of the intersection of ‘time’ and ‘place’ as determining factors in articulating a contextual theology. In the Australian context this means coming to terms with 40 000 years of aboriginal spirituality before the introduction of Christianity; and the juxtaposition of increasing urbanisation, cultural diversity, and religious plurality faced by

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contemporary Australia. Followship is always characterised by a call of Christ that demands engagement with the world, which is why this thesis will seek to establish a method of theological engagement and followship praxis that is able to address the particular hermeneutical nuances of the contemporary Australian context.

There are a number of discrete threads to this task. This thesis will initially seek to define the followship imperative deemed so paramount to the praxis of the Christian faith. For it is only in the following of Christ that faith in Christ is enacted in the world. Without followship, the Christian faith is impotent and meaningless. This study will then establish a hermeneutical lens through which to read both the Biblical text that informs the Christian faith, and also the worldly context in which faith is lived. The importance of this task can not be overstated. The study of hermeneutics is central to the task of theology. It is the essential link between epistemology and methodology. In relation to the praxis of followship then, hermeneutics connects the things we believe and know about faith and God, and the way we perform or enact our faith in the world as followers of Christ. And so alongside the identification of a suitable hermeneutic, this thesis will also ascertain a method of theological engagement with the world.

These discrete threads will be explored by means of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Athol Gill and others in relation to the primacy of discipleship; Ludwig Wittgenstein, Paul Ricoeur, Don Cupitt and others as interlocutors of language and narrative; and George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas and others.

to help us critically engage with followship as an activity of the church in the world. The critical task is to ensure that these threads are woven together into an integrated whole. This is achieved through a process of identification and application in relation to hermeneutics. An exegetical reading of Bonhoeffer’s work is used to discern the development of his hermeneutic of followship. This is followed by a study of the way language works in relation to narrative, and draws conclusions that have obvious implications for the ethical praxis of Christ’s followers. Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic of followship is then combined with these findings to identify an authentic hermeneutic for the contemporary Australian context.

This thesis, however, makes scant use of Australian theological voices. This is because the whole idea of developing a hermeneutic of followship is that it can be used in any context. By primarily using theological sources that originate elsewhere, this thesis practically demonstrates the universality of the followship imperative. Whereas each theological context may provide specific differences in relation to ‘content’, the ‘grammar’ of our hermeneutical method remains the same.

The nature and understanding of the hermeneutical task at hand is critical. Alexander Jensen has described hermeneutics in the broadest sense as the discipline of ‘identification, analysis and removal of obstacles to understanding’. Jensen warns against the hermeneutical dangers of naïve realism. He believes there are three interrelated criteria that every Christian hermeneutic must address: (i) the ultimate reference of theological language;
(ii) the mediation of the revelation God in Jesus Christ; (iii) the relationship between meaning and language, between the human word and the Word of God.\(^{29}\) These ideas are integrated into the methodology of this thesis.

This thesis maintains that the praxis of followship is the authentic context for the language of Christian theology. The content and grammar of Christian theology are given meaning through the act of following Christ. Jensen attributes such a hermeneutic to Bonhoeffer with his claim that “(t)he communal experience of the presence of Christ is the basis of all theology”.\(^{30}\) He subsequently equates Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic with the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments. This thesis draws a different conclusion. An exegetical approach to the development of Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic offers a broader scope to his realised Christology and ecclesiology. Bonhoeffer’s writings evolve over the years to conclude that the Church is the Body of the Christ only to the extent that it is for others, that it is for the world.\(^{31}\) Indeed the demarcation of Church and world in Bonhoeffer’s theology, as with much of his developing hermeneutic, becomes more malleable and nuanced in his later writings.\(^{32}\) From his prison cell in Tegel he writes, “The transcendent is not the infinite, unattainable tasks, but the neighbour within reach in any given situation. God in human form!”\(^{33}\)

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29 Jensen, *op. cit.*, Kindle location: 4767.
31 de Gruchy, J. W., in *DBWE vol 8*, p. 27. “(W)hereas in *Discipleship* the emphasis was on the "church against the world," a church with clear-cut boundaries, in his *Ethics* the boundaries became more open, preparing the way for his conclusion that just as Christ is the "human being for others," so the church "exists only for others."
This thesis will show that the idea of followship is exemplified through the life and witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This story, filled with intrigue and faithfulness, is well known to the study of discipleship. Yet for all its familiarity, this story is essential to the understanding of what Jon Sobrino and others refer to as Christo praixs: authentically following the way of Christ through communicative action.34 For Bonhoeffer shows us that it is through the act of following and seeking to imitate Christ that we come to know Christ. Bonhoeffer’s biography is analogous with the cost of followship praxis in a time of socio-political upheaval, and contrasting religious acquiescence and persecution. By studying the narrative of Bonhoeffer’s life we gain important insight into the dialectic of conviction and belief, and the correspondence such an understanding brings to the tumultuous relationship between religious fidelity and cultural conformity.

At the time of writing, the GoodReads website has 481 different entries listed under the search for ‘Bonhoeffer books’35. Bonhoeffer is as much an industry as he is a curiosity. There are many scholarly works that dissect and analyse his work, drawing out different themes, focusing in on different aspects of his life and theology. The authoritative biographical work on Bonhoeffer was authored by his student, friend, and co-conspirator, Eberhard Bethge.36 Although there are many other sources available, ranging from the familial37 and anecdotal,38 through to more scholarly investigations of his time and

34 Sobrino, J., Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1993, p. 34.  
context,\textsuperscript{39} Bethge’s tome still remains the reference point for future biographical research.

Interpreting Bonhoeffer can be a challenge. His early academic writings on the metaphysics of ecclesiology seem so far removed from the somewhat avant-garde correspondence smuggled out of Tegel. And yet there are consistent themes that reverberate throughout his theological development. Clifford Green suggests that the key to understanding Bonhoeffer is through a hermeneutic lens of sociality.\textsuperscript{40} Green insists that one has to fully appreciate Bonhoeffer’s theological anthropology before attempting to comprehend his Christology and ecclesiology. Bonhoeffer’s Christology, however, perceived by many scholars as the centrepoint of theology,\textsuperscript{41} is understood very differently by such scholars as Joel Lawrence\textsuperscript{42} and Larry Rasmussen.\textsuperscript{43} Lawrence sees Bonhoeffer’s Christology as the source of his passion for ecclesial reform, and Rasmussen believes Bonhoeffer’s Christology is the primary driver for his participation in the resistance movement. Some scholars such as Ralf Wüstenberg\textsuperscript{44} have used Bonhoeffer’s later writings as a lens to his earlier thought, and others such as Charles Marsh have used his early theorising in transcendental philosophy as a way of interpreting his

\textsuperscript{40} Green, C., Bonhoeffer: Theology of Sociality, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999. Green’s insistence upon investigating Bonhoeffer’s ‘theological anthropology’ most closely approximates my emphasis upon Bonhoeffer’s theography. Bonhoeffer’s theology is unequivocally shaped by the emergence of Hitler’s National Socialism. The two can not be separated. This is more obvious when Bonhoeffer is read chronologically. Bonhoeffer’s lived experience dramatically influences his theological development, and in turn, his theology most definitely provides a hermeneutic through which he interprets his life.
\textsuperscript{41} See also Bethge, E., Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography, First Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2000, p. 219.
provocative musings from prison. Stephen Plant understands Bonhoeffer’s theology springing from a deep devotion to scripture, and Andreas Pantgritz sees the relationship that Bonhoeffer has with Karl Barth as an informative field of study. Even Bonhoeffer’s poetry has been suggested as a way of better understanding his theology. The legacy Bonhoeffer has left behind touches on just about all aspects of theological engagement with the church and world.

This thesis, however, investigates the development of Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic in relation to his reading of both Word and world, and seeks to discover a relevant methodological application for the contemporary Australian context. It is a journey with Bonhoeffer in the formulation of his theology and the maturing of his discipleship praxis, but only to the extent that it seeks to inform our hermeneutic. Use of other Bonhoeffer scholars has been minimal at times because of the need to read Bonhoeffer on his own

50 The phrase ‘Word and world’ is well attested in theology. It is often attributed to the dialectic theology of Karl Barth. It refers to the theological meeting place of the Word (as the Revelation of Christ) and the world (as the primary place of God’s mission). Its use often implies a place of confrontation between the Kingdom of God and the Empires of the world. For a more detailed investigation of the phrase ‘Word and world’, and its importance in relation to Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutics, see also Winter, S., “Word and World: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Biblical Interpretation Today”, Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies, June 2012; vol. 25, 2: pp. 161-175.
terms. In the tradition of Marcus Borg, I have attempted to meet Bonhoeffer again for the first time\textsuperscript{51}.

In similar fashion, Paul Ricoeur develops a reading strategy for the exegesis of scripture that relies on what he refers to as a second naiveté.\textsuperscript{52} His purpose is to revisit the ancient symbolic mythology of sacred texts as a post-critical reader, encountering such texts as if it is for the first time. Following this strategy, the hermeneutic circle then becomes a hermeneutic helix, as each reading moves interpretation forward into new ground. Such an approach does have its limitations, however, for not every re-reading will produce new insight, and at some point there is a danger that ‘new insight’ will negatively impose itself upon the fidelity of the original text. But a reading strategy that carefully negotiates the use of a second naiveté does provide a helpful methodology for the re-reading of any well-read text, such as we find with Bonhoeffer’s writings.

Bonhoeffer’s script is, of course, not ancient symbolic mythology. It is the contention of this thesis, however, that Bonhoeffer’s use of terminology such as ‘religious Christianity’, ‘world come of age’, and ‘cheap and costly grace’ among others, has become symbolic in the study of discipleship. The story of Bonhoeffer’s life and particularly the circumstances surrounding his martyrdom, have become quite mythic in the way they engage with contemporary readers.\textsuperscript{53} In many ways Bonhoeffer has become an icon

\textsuperscript{53} For a helpful appraisal of both the scholarly and populist receptions of Bonhoeffer’s work, see in particular de Gruchy, Companion, op. cit., pp.93-109.
rather than an historic figure. It is with this in mind that our study of Bonhoeffer will utilize a second _naiveté_.

In many ways my reading strategy with regards to Bonhoeffer is akin to that of a Biblical exegete. I seek to uncover how Bonhoeffer’s writings are related to his _Sitz im Leben_. Because of this, the writing style of my thesis may seem a little unusual. In my analysis of Bonhoeffer, I do not begin by focusing on the well-known themes that have arisen from previous investigations of his theology. Instead I let Bonhoeffer’s writing introduce his ideas on his own terms. Reading Bonhoeffer in this way becomes an exegetical demonstration of followship itself. Followers of Jesus already know how the story ends. Yet it is in the faithful following of the call of Christ that the lessons of discipleship praxis are truly learned. The exegetical task is never ‘elegant’ or ‘an easy road’. My methodology has focused on fidelity rather than finesse.

Our primary purpose in reading Bonhoeffer is to identify a hermeneutic of followship that can be readily applied to a contemporary Australian context. A hermeneutic of followship is not only needed as a reading strategy for the sacred texts of the Biblical canon, but also for the texts that disciples encounter in their daily living. As Karl Barth observed, disciples of Christ must have a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other, and it is the Bible that interprets the newspaper.54 The identification, via Bonhoeffer, of the Incarnate One, the Crucified One, and the Resurrected One, as the primary hermeneutic through which disciples interpret both Word and world, is the basis from which this thesis will then develop a strategy of engagement.

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Bonhoeffer shows us that the Incarnate One is the Christ who lives with us and for us; the Word of God who has pitched a tent in our midst. The Crucified One is the Christ who is persecuted for the sake of righteousness; the One who give meaning to our suffering and joins with us in our sorrow. The Resurrected One is the Christ who reminds us that fear and death will ultimately succumb to the power of love. This enduring hermeneutic of followship enables us to see Christ already at work in the world. And the followship imperative insists that where Christ is – we must follow.

The obvious theological and existential distance that Bonhoeffer has with the contemporary Australian context is somewhat overcome when one considers his ongoing theological influence in this country. Theological faculties across the country continue to enliven discussion on his contribution to areas as diverse as politics and ethics, through to Christology and ecclesial reform. In more recent times his legacy has also been the topic of political commentary and debate due to an article written in October, 2006, by then federal opposition leader and leader of the Australian Labor Party, Kevin Rudd, in the quarterly political publication, The Monthly. Rudd’s assertion that, “Bonhoeffer is, without doubt, the man I admire most in the history of the twentieth century”, invited contributions to Australian political debate from theologians, historians, and social commentators from every quarter. As a result, political controversies surrounding the partisan politics of ‘same-sex

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55 In November 2013 the Broken Bay Institute, Newcastle University will host the 9th Australian Bonhoeffer Conference. In March 2014 the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne will host a Bonhoeffer Intensive.  
marriage’ and ‘asylum seeker policy’ now also include the theology and ethics of Bonhoeffer.  

The Australian Theological Forum’s recent launch of the *Bonhoeffer Legacy: Australasian Journal of Bonhoeffer Studies* is a further example of Australia’s fascination with Bonhoeffer. Its inaugural edition includes articles on Same-Sex Marriage, the Australian Christian Lobby, and the Politicisation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, by Mark Lindsay, Bonhoeffer and the Yoke of Discipleship in Contemporary Australia, by Maurice Schild and Bonhoeffer and the Politics of the Divine, by Veronica Brady. This ongoing interest highlights the need to read Bonhoeffer well, lest the danger of eisegesis severely limits our understanding.

As Bonhoeffer asserts, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be a follower of Jesus. This statement should not be read too quickly. It lies at the very heart of what it means to be Christian (Christ-one) and, as such, it constitutes a notion of ontological primacy for the Christian faith. The New Testament itself is both a witness to, and a testimony of, the disciples who responded to Jesus’ call to follow. It was recorded by disciples for discipleship communities. Traditionally, the study of discipleship, located within a wider theoretical

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60 Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, *op. cit.*, p. 56. “There is no road to faith or discipleship, no other road – only obedience to the call of Jesus.”

framework of the Christian life or ecclesiology, has been relegated to the nether regions of theological enquiry, somewhere behind the noble subject headings of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In more contemporary times, across a variety of theological perspectives, this relegation seems to persist. Douglas John Hall’s first instalment to the study of theology from a North American perspective, *Thinking the Faith*, hardly addresses the notion of ‘discipleship’ aside from two references in the introduction. Lutheran Robert Jensen’s two volume works on systematic theology makes no mention of discipleship whatsoever, nor does Grenz and Olsen’s evangelical treatment of twentieth century theology, or Plantinga’s *et al.* philosophical introduction to Christian theology.

It is the contention of this thesis, however, that the notion of discipleship, referred to as followship from here on, is much more than a sociological or ecclesiological category utilised in the study of Christian community and the work of the church. It is both an existential locator of life experience and the primary hermeneutic for the praxis of faith. It is a transcendent call to follow from beyond the self and the contingent nature of this world. Followship is always grounded in the otherness of God and the revelatory purpose of the Triune God.

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62 For example, Thomas Aquinas addresses ‘Humankind’ in the Second Part of his *Summa Theologica*; John Calvin examines the ‘Christian Life’ in his Third Book of *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Karl Barth addresses the topic of the ‘Christian Life’ in vol IV.4 of *Church Dogmatics* (final volume).


The very idea of followship embraces a number of diverse elements. It has an anatomy, a structure, a meaning, a purpose. Followship is not singularly concerned with doctrinal learning or rule following. Nor is it solely focussed upon inner well-being or spiritual practices per se. Rather, followship is primarily related to the praxis of discipleship; it is an integrated, dynamic, faithful, and communal response to the call to follow. Followship engages the traditional Reformation hallmarks of the Christian life (justification, sanctification, vocation)\textsuperscript{67} and seeks to incarnate these doctrines into a lived experience of reflective narrative practice.

The followship imperative also alludes to the Wesleyan doctrine of the ‘order of salvation’ – justification, sanctification and glorification.\textsuperscript{68} For Wesley, it is the prevenient grace of God that is already present in the world preparing the way for salvation. It is God’s justifying grace that brings about a conversion that is readily evidenced in the life of believers. It is God’s sanctifying grace that transforms the life of believers from sinfulness to holiness. Holiness in this respect is concerned with the work of God substantiated in the life of the believer – it is about faithfulness and obedience and the process of becoming more like Christ. Glorification, the final stage in the process of salvation, is the process whereby the redemptive love of God reconciles all of creation. Followship, then, is very similar to an understanding of the Wesleyan order of salvation enacted in the life of believers. The goal of followship is not perfection, however, but faithfulness.


Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic pre-empts the narrative theologies of the latter twentieth century and reinforces the need to develop a methodology for disciples to engage the world of stories they inhabit.\(^{69}\) For the call to followship is an invitation to participate within a particular ‘language game’. The use of Ludwig Wittgenstein here is critical. Wittgenstein recognises that language creates the world in which we live. He postulates that we participate in ‘language games’ in order to make sense of the world, and our communication is often confused because our conversations are simply ‘playing’ different games. Wittgenstein advocates what he refers to as picture thinking in order to bypass the closed circle of the language problem. Wittgenstein’s theories have considerable implications for the way we talk about faith and life.

Further to identifying the role of language in the formation of our faith, Ricoeur, Don Cupitt and others explore the way stories construct our world. Not only do we live in a world of stories, but the story-world for disciples is one that has already been told (even as we are telling it). To be a disciple is to live inside the story of Jesus Christ. Augusto Boal’s concept of the ‘spect-actor’ and Samuel Well’s methodology of improvisation are instrumental at this point. Disciples participate in the story of Christ as it unfolds around them. Carl Braaten’s understanding of eschatopraxis gives insight into how disciples are to enact the Kingdom of God and, by doing so, become proleptic of Christ’s return. The methodology here is not so much narrative theology, but rather narrative participation. Our goal is to discover what narrative

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participation in the story of Christian fellowship looks like in a contemporary Australian context.

The New Testament authors understood this idea of narrative participation. The apostle Paul implores his readers to imitate him, even as he imitates Christ. In the Johannine epistles we read that whosoever wishes to abide in Christ must walk as Jesus walked. In the book of Acts we find the first use of the word *koinōnia* (koinonia) in the New Testament. Koinonia is often translated as ‘communion’ in English versions of the Greek text, but its meaning is also nuanced by ideas of fellowship, partnership, mutuality and sharing. The early church understood koinonia as a word that described their experience with one another in Christ. Some were Jews, others were Gentiles, but they shared and lived the same Christ-story.

The final section of this thesis explores the implications of this hermeneutic for how we share and live our stories in a contemporary Australian context. Australia is an anthology of many stories. I have sought to identify Australian stories of varying origins and genres in order to emphasize the broad application of our hermeneutic. By identifying the Incarnate One in popular Australian fiction and indigenous Dreaming, we can stipulate that God is already present in the stories we like to read and share; the stories that we explicitly understand as formative, and also the ones that we read because we would like to be formed by them. The Crucified One is revealed in the

70 1 Corinthians 11:1.
71 1 John 2:6.
72 Acts 2:42.
vilification of asylum seekers by Australian media outlets and demands a response from disciples. In the contemporary Australian context, those who are seeking asylum are the archetypal other, and by choosing these stories Christ speaks from the deafening silence of those who have no voice. The Resurrected One is encountered in the personal testimonies of loss and hope disclosed by survivors of the Queensland floods of 2011. For when disaster comes, the witness of everyday people, just like the women from the empty tomb, can often plant the seeds of hope needed for new life.

This project is one that establishes a hermeneutic praxis for followship as narrative participation in Christ’s story of reconciliation in the world. The study of Bonhoeffer as an exemplar of followship and the subsequent exegesis of his writings, helps to identify his hermeneutic of the Incarnate One, the Crucified One and the Resurrected One. This hermeneutic is utilised within a methodology of narrative participation to examine the performance of faith in differing contexts, concluding with applications in contemporary Australia. The *Hermeneutics of Followship*, then, is offered as a contribution to the study of how disciples (followers) authenticate their faithfulness to the Lordship of Christ.
Chapter One:

From Discipleship to Followship

(Followship) assumes radically concrete form, because it is shaped by the concreteness of God's coming to humanity in Jesus Christ.\footnote{Marsh, Reclaiming op. cit., p. 149.}

1.1 On The Way\footnote{See also Moltmann, J., The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions. Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1993. p. xii “…I am trying to think of Christ no longer statically, as one person in two natures or as a historical personality. I am trying to grasp him dynamically, in the forward movement of God’s history with the world. What I wanted was not an eternal Christology for heaven, but a Christology for men and women who are on the way in the conflicts of history.”}

Of continued importance for the purpose of this thesis is the distinction between discipleship and followship. The term ‘disciple’ is used in the Christian New Testament as a translation of the Greek word, \( \mu \alpha \theta \eta \tau \iota \varsigma \)\footnote{\( \mu \alpha \theta \eta \tau \iota \varsigma \) occurs 261 times in the New Testament; 233 times in the gospels; 155 times in the Synoptics.} (student/disciple), and so, it could easily be argued that the primary concern for a study on discipleship should be one of pedagogy. And yet learning takes many forms. The gospel narratives do not portray Jesus the teacher\footnote{Of the 90 times that Jesus was addressed directly in the gospels, on 60 occasions he was referred to as ‘teacher’ (Gk: \( \delta \iota \alpha \kappa \alpha \kappa \lambda \omicron \varsigma \)).} establishing a school, but rather forming a community of followers. It seems as if Jesus understood that learning is fully realised when it is embodied, rather than merely acknowledged.\footnote{See also Myers, C., Binding the Strongman: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1988.p. 285. Myers refers to Jesus’ pedagogical method as a ‘school of the road’. The gospel is written as a drama full of ‘object lessons and symbolic action’.} Thus, followship in the New Testament presupposes this understanding of embodied learning in the way Jesus exemplifies rather than explains. It is through telling stories along the way...
rather than teaching dogmas in a sedentary space. In fact, all of theology	rightfully understood, is a study of the way the church embodies the teachings of
Christ. Or, as James Cone explains;

> Theological concepts have meaning only as they are translated
> into theological praxis, that is, the Church living in the world on the
> basis of what it proclaims.”\(^79\)

Discipleship is also relational. To be a disciple presupposes a didactic
relationship between a teacher and a learner. In the New Testament writings,
however, especially in the gospel narratives, this didactic relationship is also
dynamic – it involves movement. The first century disciples of Jesus were not
students who sat at the feet of their rabbi yearning for pedagogical
sustenance. They were his travelling companions; they were disciples and
followers of ‘the Way’ (ἡ ὁδός).\(^80\) This following the Way of Christ demands
an ontological recognition that God in Christ is both prevenient: God has gone
before to prepare the Way. And God is also provident: God is a travelling
companion and instructor, and through Jesus’ journey to the cross, essentially
incarnates the route itself.\(^81\) This Way of followship, then, is contingent upon
the existential realities of the One who calls and the one who follows, and the
eschatological reality of the destination that awaits. In this regard, the Way of

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80 ὁδός appears 99 times in the New Testament; 62 times in the gospels; 58 times in the
Synoptics. See Gill, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-23. Gill introduces the concept of discipleship being ‘on
the way’ with Jesus and the gospel narratives as the ‘road maps’ we need to follow. Also
Myers, C., *Binding the Strongman: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*, Maryknoll,
Orbis, 1988, p. 124. Myers identifies ‘the way’ as the central discipleship motif’ in the Gospel
of Mark.
Christ is one that requires of followers an existential solidarity with the Biblical narrative.

Even though the followship accounts of the New Testament come to us in narrative form, the stories present themselves is such ways as to invite, and even require or demand our participation. The grammar of followship in the gospels, then, is one that balances a third-person re-telling of the stories of Jesus and the disciples, along with a vocative address to readers of the text. When Jesus asks questions of the disciples in the narratives such as, ‘Who do you say that I am?’, his enquiry is also aimed ‘in front’ of the text to the discipleship community which is reading the gospel. When the narrative contains an imperative from Jesus to the disciples to ‘follow me’, it is the discipleship community reading the text that must respond.

Writing with reference to the plight of asylum seekers, Susan Snyder reflects on this nuanced relationship with the Biblical narratives as an invitation to journey with Christ in exile and alienation. Predominantly authored around narrative themes such as the liberation from Egyptian slavery and the humiliation of Babylonian captivity, the Hebrew Bible is shaped by communal experiences of migration and dislocation. These continuing themes also provide the socio-political and theological canvass on which the New Testament portrait of followship is portrayed. This is the story of followship that demands our participation.

82 Mark 8:29.
83 The NRSV renders the phrase ‘follow me’ 21 time in the gospel narratives. Each time it is attributed to Jesus.
84 Snyder, S., Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church, Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, 2012. See in particular pp. 129-137.
85 Snyder, op. cit., p. 132. “The exile formed the predominant material, psychological and spiritual context for the writing and compiling of the Hebrew Bible.”
From the selected Messianic prophecies referenced in the gospel narratives, to the genealogies listed in Matthew and Luke, through to the birth narratives themselves, the evangels of the early koinonia prepare their various fellowship communities for a vocation that is both incarnate and alien. Jesus follows in the narrative footsteps of the sojourners who have gone before him, from Abram and Moses, through to Ezra and Nehemiah. The thematic odysseys of exodus and exile, return and restoration, are depicted in the stories Jesus tells, and demonstrated in the praxis of his life.

(T)he Gospels indicate that Jesus lived as a wandering ‘stranger’ among others who inhabited the edges of society. In the Gospels of Mathew and Luke, Jesus is portrayed as being ‘on the road’, as his parents travel from the census and the flee to Egypt. He was an itinerant preacher who stood alongside the marginalized and he ‘migrated’ from heaven to earth and back again… The whole period of the incarnation can be understood as the ‘displacement’ of God towards his people.86

The Way of Christ is also the way of the cross.87 This correspondence is not because of predetermined soteriological principles of atonement, but because of the Biblical narratives that articulate his journey toward Jerusalem. The cross is predetermined by Christ’s love for the world, and the world’s response to that love. To follow the Way of Christ is to follow the way of Christ's love, which inevitably means confronting the very powers that crucified Him.88 To follow the Way of Christ is to count everything else loss

86 Snyder, op. cit., p. 132.
87 See also Douglass John Hall, The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003. (Referred to as Cross from here on.)
88 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 87. “Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of his suffering and rejection, so the disciple is a disciple only is so far as he shares his Lord’s suffering and rejection and crucifixion.”
even unto death. To follow the Way of Christ is to deny self, not as a form of masochistic self-deprecation, but rather as identification with the existential reality of the crucified Christ as the One who calls to us.

The disciple must say to himself the same words Peter said of Christ when he denied him. “I know not this man.” … To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us.

In this sense, the follower of Christ is akin to a dead-man-walking (sic) – that is, one already sentenced to death and waiting execution. This death to self is so-called because the very nature of discipleship is at its core fundamentally opposed to the self(ish)-life that we instinctively crave. Self-life here refers to the projection of self above and beyond the lives of others. In doing so, it inevitably results in the death of community and, in turn, the death of life itself. Christ’s commands concerning love for God, love for neighbour and love for enemy, however, are all other oriented motivations for love. As such, they endeavour to create community between humankind and the divine. Even Christ’s edict of love for self is qualified in terms of a love for others. So, it is in being for others, denying self, that we find life. And yet this abundant life that Christ offers is at the same time that which is found in

89 Philippians 1:21. “For me living is Christ and death is gain.” (author’s translation)
90 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 88.
91 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p.89. “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”
92 Matt. 22:39b. “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”
Christ,\textsuperscript{93} for being in Christ demands a solidarity with the other orientation of Jesus to the world.\textsuperscript{94} To deny self, to be for others, is to give to others the gift of life that God has first given to us. This is the followship journey. And this journey invariably involves the call to repentance.\textsuperscript{95} Here there is a turning around of one’s life and one’s life orientation to realise that in order to find life, one must first lose it. It is an adventure that leads through the waters of baptism, and confronts temptation in the wilderness. It is a path of suffering to the extent that it brings healing. It is an invitation to life to the extent that it is born on the cross. Being for others, however, is not to be confused with patronistic imperialism. For it is also essentially about being existentially with others; in solidarity with the hopes and fears, faith and doubt, dreams and despair of the community at large. It is oriented towards being for others because the promise of the eschaton and the coming rule and reign of God is oriented for the world.

It is in this other-orientation, away from self and toward others, that followship is also intimately related to fellowship.\textsuperscript{96} To follow Christ is to join with others who have undertaken the same journey on the Way. Followship is not concerned with an individual pursuit or spiritual quest for enlightenment, but rather the dynamic praxis of faith community. The eschatological promises of Christ are proclaimed for the church as community – not for individual believers (regardless of the inadequacies of English translations that seem to

\textsuperscript{93} The phrase ‘in Christ’ (ἐν Χριστῷ) appears 76 times in the New Testament.
\textsuperscript{94} It is important to note that in the pericope of Mark 8:27-30, Jesus asks who ‘the world’ says he is, before he asks of the disciples.
\textsuperscript{95} Mark 1:15b. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”
\textsuperscript{96} This term should not be read in terms of gender exclusivity, but rather is chosen because of its similarity to the term ‘followship’.
To be a follower of Christ is to be a part of a pilgrim people, sojourners on the Way, who count among their number the poor and the hungry, the broken and the naked, the marginalised and the forgotten, those left behind by society at large. It is within this disparate and desperate amalgam of confused and dislocated individuals that a common story is both remembered and proclaimed. It is in the embodiment of this communal remembrance that the story of followship comes alive.

Followship in the 21st century, however, is beset by a raft of existential challenges that 1st century followers did not have to face. The Way of the cross is not one that comes easily in any time or place, and yet for contemporary followers there is also the challenge of Christological identification. Bonhoeffer rightly asked, “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?”

Here we are faced with an obvious hermeneutical dilemma: how are we to follow in our contemporary here and now an historical figure who died on a cross, in another land, 2000 years ago? Clive Marsh addresses this problem by shifting the burden of the question away from Bonhoeffer’s ‘who’ to ‘where is Christ to be found today?’ In doing so, Marsh recognizes the presence of Christ in three interlocking forms:

First, Christ is embodied in particular kinds of relationships - those in which people see and find justice, worth and dignity. Second, Christ is a spiritual presence within people who seek such

97 In the koinonia Greek of the New Testament, the second person singular (σὺ) and the second person plural (ὑμεῖς) are two different words, and can be easily distinguished. The contemporary English language makes no such distinction, however, and the tense of the original Greek can easily be confused in translation. For example, 1Cor. 6:19, “(D)o you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” The English rendering of ‘you’ and ‘your’, is entirely second person plural in the original Greek, and hence, should only be read as a statement pertaining to the church, not to individuals.

relationships. Third, Christ exists as words and images about Jesus/Christ, which are a resource for people in their task of forming justice-seeking relationships. I suggest that Christ exists in all three of these forms simultaneously, and is not reducible to any one of them alone. ‘Christ’ thus needs to be understood as a fundamentally relational concept... Christology leaves its task incomplete if it seeks to interpret an isolated individual figure, especially if that figure is located in the historical past... Jesus Christ is best understood relationally because Christ is encountered among groups of people who – wittingly or unwittingly, in the context of human life – follow or experience the God who is known as the Father of Jesus Christ. Christology is thus not a task undertaken in the abstract. 

The concrete nature of Christology’s endeavour also leads us to the necessity for a tangible methodology of followship praxis. We begin by asking questions of Christological identity (who?) and location (where?), but only because the answers sought here require an active response from those who inquire. Thus, the followship imperative demands that the Way of Christ becomes the Way of those who dare to follow as well.

1.2 The Primacy of Obedience

Discipleship – followship – is hard. It is not an outworking of our own competencies and resources as if somehow we could actually walk in the footsteps of Christ in and of our own accord. It is instead primarily an activity of God’s grace that both calls to humankind and then walks with humankind in our response. The response of the disciple is one of faithful obedience discerned on the Way with Christ, as opposed to the rote learning of a patterned response. It is here, at the intersection of life and learning, of

revelation and obedience, that authentic faith takes shape in the life of a disciple. Daniel Migliore argues that the,

Christian faith is at bottom trust in and obedience to the free and gracious God made know in Jesus Christ. Christian theology is this same faith in the mode of asking questions and struggling to find at least provisional answers to these questions. Authentic faith is no sedative for world-weary souls, no satchel full of ready answers to the deepest questions of life. Instead, faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ sets an inquiry in motion, fights the inclination to accept things as they are, and continually calls in question unexamined assumptions about God, our world, and ourselves. Consequently, Christian faith has nothing in common with indifference to the search for truth, or fear of it, or the arrogant claim to possess it fully. True faith must be distinguished from fideism. Fideism says there comes a point where we must stop asking questions and must simply believe; faith keeps seeking and asking.\textsuperscript{100}

This response of obedience to grace, from which faith arises, is not to be confused with the gift of grace itself. To respond obediently to the One who calls us to follow is to open our mouths so that the very breath of God may fill our lungs and give us life.\textsuperscript{101} Even though it is the breath of God that gives life, it is in the opening of our mouths that we are enabled to breathe.\textsuperscript{102}

Care needs to be taken here lest we once more enjoin the difficult, and I would suggest somewhat artificially imposed, theological dialectic of law versus grace.\textsuperscript{103} For even though, as Paul Zahl insists, “the law of God is absolute, and the grace of God is undeviating”, they find resolution in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{100} Migliore, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{101} The Greek word for breath is the same as the word for spirit (\textit{πνεῦμα}). Thus the Holy Spirit can also be understood in terms of God’s breath.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge, op. cit.}, p. 65. “Although Peter cannot achieve his own conversion, he can leave his nets”.
\item \textsuperscript{103} For an insightful analysis of the grace law dialectic see Zahl, P., Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2007.
\end{itemize}
Christ. The New Testament gospels embed the story of God’s grace in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Through the gospel narratives we discover that grace is the answer to the sum of our discipleship not the piecemeal data for our soteriological calculations. The call to followship is the gift of grace and it is the act of following that is its embodiment. Rather than inflicting a contrived dialectic path of grace and law in order to circumvent the difficult terrain inherent within philosophical theology, the gospel narratives weave these two notions together in the praxis of faith. It is not so much that there is a synthesis here between two distinct ideas, but rather that these concepts were never meant to be considered separately in the first place. The relationship between law (or works) and grace is one whereby each is given life and meaning by the other. Grace is the work of God and it invites us to participate within it – this giving of grace intrinsically also requires work on our behalf. Just as,

acquired knowledge cannot be divorced from the existence in which it is acquired, so too the only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ.

1.3 The Followship Imperative

The praxis of discipleship is the only medium for the experience of the Christian faith. The Christian disciple life is lived as a disciple. There is no choice here. Discipleship is not an optional extra or ecclesial accessory to the

104 Zahl, op. cit., Kindle Location: 1055.
105 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 51.
106 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 51.

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Christian faith. To be a Christian is to be a disciple – that is, one who responds to the call to follow. Alternatively, not to be a disciple is not to be a Christian.\textsuperscript{108} This notion of following is one that assumes both an existential location (a starting point) and the response to a directive (the call to follow). Both of these assumptions, however, do not occur within some sort of hypothetical ideality or theoretical vacuum. They are essential elements of the Biblical narrative that occur within time and space and, as such, are constitutive of specific locations and directions. The call to follow is not an esoteric abstract but rather a conversational imperative. Jesus calls specific people in a specific time and place to follow in a specific direction (albeit a direction of life as opposed to a geographical orientation). As such, followship is concerned with both where we are and where we are going.

The followship imperative as an invitation/command to join Jesus on the Way is well attested in theological and Biblical scholarship, devotional reflections, and liturgical writings. Theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann,\textsuperscript{109} and Stanley Hauerwas,\textsuperscript{110} have understood intimately the socio-political formation that occurs when faith communities dare to journey with Christ as an act of discipleship. Biblical scholars such as Athol Gill,\textsuperscript{111} and Ched Myers,\textsuperscript{112} have studied the gospel narratives with a hermeneutic that seeks to locate disciples ‘on the road’ with Jesus. Devotional classics such as Pilgrim’s Progress\textsuperscript{113}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[108] Matthew 7:21. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”
\item[111] Gill, op. cit.
\item[112] Myers, C., Binding the Strongman: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1988.
\end{footnotes}
and *In His Steps*\(^{114}\) provide fictional accounts of the personal and corporate spiritual journey inherent to Christian discipleship. And in 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia, to which I belong, covenanted to form a union from three different Protestant traditions (Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational) on the basis that disciples of Christ are ‘the people of God on the way’.\(^{115}\) The journey of discipleship begins with a call to follow, but necessarily requires a response.

To hear and discern the voice of the One who calls us to follow\(^{116}\) is to respond to revelation from a *Wholly Other*.\(^{117}\) This Wholly Other is one who is incarnated into the everyday existence of those whom society prefers to forget, the marginalised and the oppressed, as one who ‘pitches a tent in our midst’.\(^{118}\) As such, to respond to this voice is to respond to the spokesperson of those who have no voice.\(^{119}\) It is also to respond to the One whose voice is the voice of the voiceless and who is existentially incarnated among the

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116 The Greek verb *to follow* (αὐτολογίζω) in its various grammatical forms occurs 90 times in the New Testament, 79 times of which occur in the four gospels. There are also two other occasions when the phrase *come after me* (δεύτε ὁπίσω μου) occurs (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17) which is usually translated into English as the imperative *follow me*.
117 A term well attested to the theology of Karl Barth.
118 John 1:14. ἔσκινδωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν – ‘pitched a tent among us’ (author’s translation). This notion of Jesus walking amongst us as *Wholly Other* also stands alongside the final remarks in Schweitzer, A., *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (first completed edition), London, SCM Press, 2000, p. 487. “He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who did not know who he was. He says the same words, ‘Follow me!’, and sets us to those tasks which we must fulfill in our time. He commands. And to those who hearken to him, whether wise or unwise, he will reveal himself in the peace, the labours, the conflicts and the suffering that they may experience in his fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery they will learn who he is.”
119 See also Bonhoeffer, D., *Christ the Centre*, New York, First Harper and Row, 1978, p. 27. (Referred to as CC from here on) “Teaching about Christ begins in silence......To speak of Christ means to keep silent; to keep silent about Christ means to speak. When the Church speaks rightly out of a proper silence, then Christ is proclaimed.”
broken and the outcast. To respond to the One who calls is to respond to the least; to respond to the cry of the least is to respond to the call of Christ.\textsuperscript{120}

The praxis of followship, then, constitutes a hermeneutical lens to read and interpret the world and identify the direction in which we are to move. The hermeneutical task of followship is not constrained to the Biblical texts, although these are, of course, of primary importance. It is rather a task that engages all texts, both written and otherwise, encountered in life.\textsuperscript{121} All of our life experiences, whether they are relational, spiritual, vocational, or recreational, seek the coherency and uniformity of a common hermeneutical lens.\textsuperscript{122} But, of course, for Christian disciples, the choice to live one’s own life is no longer an option\textsuperscript{123} – they have begun the journey of forfeiting their own life in order to find abundant life in Christ.\textsuperscript{124}

In the context of a pluralistic kaleidoscope of competing existential ideologies and world-views, Christian discipleship is one of many possibilities. We are all disciples of something. That is to say, we are all following either a person or an idea or a hope (or following a path that leads away from such

\textsuperscript{120} Matthew 25:40. “Truly I say to you, in as much as you do to the least of my family – you also do to me.” (author’s translation).


\textsuperscript{122} This is not to suggest of course that at different times, and in different places, under different circumstances, that people do not encounter and interpret their experiences differently. For an insightful exploration of experiences of life and their relation to God see Moltmann, J., \textit{The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation}, London, SCM Press, 1992, pp. 17-38. See in particular Bonhoeffer, D., \textit{Ethics}, New York, Touchstone, 1995, pp. 21-24. Bonhoeffer talks about the world of conflicts, whereby, because humankind insists it has the knowledge of good and evil, it persists in trying to be God in determining its own future.

\textsuperscript{123} Matthew 16:24-26. Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?” See also John 10:10b. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”.

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hypotheses). For the Christian disciple, however, the direction is already a predetermined one. It is predetermined not by geographical locators or even socio-political interpretations of reality, but rather by the Biblical narrative of the Christ event. The Christian disciple is one who responds to the Christ who calls us to follow, and the direction He leads us is toward the cross. Thus, followers of Christ must necessarily discern the specificity of the cross event in their own context, that which Hall refers to as the *hic et nunc* (*the here and now*). For the crucifixion not only occurs at Golgotha outside of Jerusalem in 33CE, but also in Tegel Prison in the western suburbs of Berlin in 1945. And the hope of resurrection is not only found in the witness of those who discover an empty tomb, but also in the recovery from flood devastation in Queensland, 2011.

…(E)ntering into the specificity of one’s own time and place is the *conditio sine qua non* of real theological work. Without that participatory act and identity, theology inevitably lapses into mere doctrine. The world that the disciples of the crucified one are obliged to take seriously is first of all the world that is their own.

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125 The terminology of Christ event refers to the totality of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and promised Parousia of Jesus Christ. It is both historical, in that it has occurred in measured time, and also ahistorical, in that it stands outside of time as a quantifiable event.
Part One

The Benefit of Having an Exemplar

The basic assumption of a Christian understanding of followship is that it is a practice. It is tied to the New Testament imperative to follow Jesus and become a disciple. That call to follow is transcendent. It crosses time and place. It is no longer confined to first century Palestine. Being a practice means that followship is something you do. It must be acted out. The call to follow must be embodied in specific circumstances. This necessity of its enactment opens up the prospect of exemplars – that is, particular individuals who respond to the call to follow and become disciples in a way that illustrates what followship is.

Now it could be argued that the most obvious exemplar is Jesus of Nazareth. It is he who, after all, urges his followers to ‘follow me’. For this reason the apostle Paul encourages the early Christian communities to whom he writes that they should imitate Christ. This theme of following and imitating is critical to the New Testament understanding of discipleship and being Christian. It is arguably the case, though, that followship requires taking one step back. What we need are exemplars who are not also the subjects of followship. Jesus and the risen Christ are those subjects. What is it like for someone from another time and place to follow Christ? In the midst of historical circumstance how do we ‘aspire’ to follow Christ, given the claims made about him and which separate us from him? The Christian may confess Christ is ‘fully human’ but, at the same time, will also proclaim he is ‘fully divine’ – which we are not. The exemplars of followship must share our common humanity without the benefit of any other nature.

This theory of followship is established upon the discipleship praxis of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer is widely regarded across a spectrum of theological and faith traditions as both a serious scholar and a devoted disciple of Christ. His written legacy provides us with examples of philosophical enquiry, theological exegesis, and proposed models for ecclesial reform. The story of
his life is one of faithful obedience to the call of Christ, loving devotion to the work of the Church, and courageous witness even unto martyrdom. Bonhoeffer is thus our primary exemplar for followship.

The fact that his followship was played out in the first half of twentieth century Germany will inevitably mean that we are faced with further hermeneutical issues. Bonhoeffer’s story is not our story. And yet, the call of Christ needs to be followed wherever and whenever we are. Even though the ‘language game’ of Bonhoeffer’s Germany is very different to that of contemporary Australia, a fully developed hermeneutic of followship will transcend the particularities of time and place.

Bonhoeffer’s legacy in relation to discipleship is well known. Because he did not produce a ‘systematic theology’ as such, the breadth of his contribution to the discipline of theology is often, however, undervalued. In order to understand better the hermeneutic of followship of which he is an exemplar, it is essential that we examine his major literary works,\(^\text{128}\) and discover the central themes of a lived theology.\(^\text{129}\) The principle of followship encourages us to explore these themes as they emerge and take shape, rather than abstract them from the unfolding story of his life.

This overriding concern for followship requires a study of Bonhoeffer that will essentially entail a review of his life-story and his writings as primary sources, rather than relying too heavily on other commentators. My purpose for doing this is to identify the organic development of his thinking so that it can then be authentically adapted to the narrative methodology that will be explored in Part Two.

We begin our investigation with Bonhoeffer’s theography – that is, the development and practice of his theology in relation to the story of his life. Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic of followship is one that has fully integrated his theological reasoning with his life experience.

\(^{128}\) See also Whitson Floyd, W. “Bonhoeffer’s Literary Legacy”, *Companion, op. cit.*, pp. 71-92.

\(^{129}\) See also Wüstenberg, *op. cit.*
The exegesis of his writings will commence with an analysis of the two published pieces of academic writing he undertook as a student – *viz* *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. Here Bonhoeffer, as a student of philosophical theology, establishes the theoretical and existential foundations of what will later become his followship imperative. That work then leads into an exegesis of two different lecture series he delivered at the University of Berlin, *Creation and Fall* and *Christ the Centre*. Through this exegesis we will also discover Bonhoeffer’s developing dialectic methodology, and the Christological and Ecclesiological centrality of Bonhoeffer’s thinking already beginning to shape his approach to the reading of Scripture and his understanding of ethics. The Biblical mandate of followship begins to emerge.

An analysis of Bonhoeffer’s work at the *Finkenwalde* Theological Seminary, *Nachfolge* and *Life Together*, will introduce us to some of his most-loved writing. Yet these texts also contain Bonhoeffer’s most strident insistence upon obedience and faithfulness to the way of Christ. Bonhoeffer is scathing in his critique of the German Christian Church, and its acquiescence to Hitler’s Nazism. For Bonhoeffer, the church is the Body of Christ taking up space in the world. There is no room for compromise. Followship is hard and costly.

Part One concludes with an examination of Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*, and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Up until this point, our treatment of Bonhoeffer will follow the chronological development of his understanding of followship, and in doing so, we allow his thinking to shape our own. His later writings, however, do not allow us to proceed in this same manner. We simply do not have an accurate chronology of the development of Bonhoeffer’s thinking during his imprisonment. What we do have is a collection of his ideas, some more developed than others, that we will use to further stimulate our own hypothesis in the development of a hermeneutic of followship.

We shall discover that Bonhoeffer utilizes a common hermeneutic throughout his writing: the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One is already present in the world, calling disciples to follow. Over the next five chapters we shall both identify this hermeneutic embedded in Bonhoeffer’s writings, and then critically examine how it is used.
In Part Two of our study, we shall explore how such a hermeneutic may provide a way forward for today’s disciples. We will do so by investigating the primordial role of language and narrative in the praxis of followship. In relation to language, Ludwig Wittgenstein will provide us with insights into how language actually works. Whether the tacit confessions of the German Christians, the chilling rhetoric of Hitler’s Nuremberg rallies, or the uncompromising call of Christ to faithful resistance, language actually shapes our lived experience rather than merely providing a description of it.

The study of language will lead us to narrative. Cupitt and Ricoeur and others will teach us that we live in a world of stories, and Bonhoeffer’s Christology will remind us that the Christ story subsumes all others. But stories are not just meant to be told. The most powerful stories are the ones we live. Followship then, is about narrative participation: living the story of Christ.
Chapter Two:

The Biography of Bonhoeffer’s Theology

(T)he development of Bonhoeffer’s theology was so related to his historical context and the way in which his life unfolded that the separation of his thought from his life inevitably becomes artificial and problematic.\(^{130}\)

The best way to explore a theology of followship is by way of an exemplar and the critical figure in the area of discipleship praxis is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906-1945.\(^ {131}\) His radical evangelical methodology, developed in conjunction with Karl Barth’s emphasis on the primacy of revelation produced an enormous paradigm shift in relation to the predominant German theologies of the time.\(^ {132}\) That was especially the case with respect to Christology, Christian ethics and ecclesiology. For Bonhoeffer, however, theology itself was necessarily subordinate to his notion of absolute adherence to the call of Christ: discipleship.\(^ {133}\) Christology, ethics, and the nature of the church and the world are major themes in his writings, but discipleship is the very canvass on which his ideas take shape. Bonhoeffer maintained that authentic Christology is always incarnated in the life of Christian believers. Christian ethics can never be based on obtuse theory or hyperbole, but can only ever be a lived ethic. And the church is the body of Christ that takes up space in the world in the lives of Jesus’ disciples.

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130 de Gruchy, Companion, op. cit., p. 97.
133 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 56. “Christianity without discipleship is Christianity without Christ.”
To better understand his theology and its consequences for a contemporary understanding of fellowship, however, we should begin with a brief survey of Bonhoeffer’s life. For as James McClendon has asserted, theological doctrines are only ever validated, inasmuch as they can be validated, by the evidence of lives lived. What was the correlation of his own learning and following? How does his theology relate to his biography? Not only is our theology informed by our lived experience, but our biography is also shaped by the theology to which we subscribe. It is with this in mind that we will investigate Bonhoeffer’s theography: that is, the intersection of theological belief with the story of his life. The term theography has been coined in conversation with Michael Earl. It presupposes the prevenience of God and the call of Christ upon us. The term ‘theography’ is aspiring to clarify what Rebecca Chopp calls ‘the poetics of witness’, and Jung Young Lee defines as the relationship between the autobiographical nature of theology and its intersection with providence. It is seeking to explain the telling of a personal story of engagement with the initiative and providence of God on one’s life. Bonhoeffer’s writings, especially his Letters and Papers from

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134 McClendon, J. W. Jr., Biography and Theology: How Life’s Stories can Remake Today’s Theology, Philadelphia, Trinity Press International, 1990, p. 80. (Referred to as BT from here on.)
135 McClendon, BT, op. cit., p. 22. “Theology must be at least biography… Biography at its best will be theology.”
136 Special Thanks to Michael Earl for his use of the term ‘theography’. See also Hauerwas S, Hannah’s Child: a Theologian’s Memoir, W.B. Eerdmans, Cambridge, 2010. Our study of Bonhoeffer’s biography will draw heavily upon the writing of his close friend and colleague Eberhard Bethge, in particular Bethge, op. cit., Even though there have been many biographical accounts of Bonhoeffer over the years, Bethge is universally considered authoritative.
Prison, bear witness to this intersection. This is nowhere more evident than in his poem ‘Who AM I?’.

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

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!  

Bonhoeffer lived in a time of turmoil and conflict. German culture and theology was being challenged and redefined by the hegemony of Hitler’s National Socialist movement and the acquiescence of Protestant Liberalism. In the lead up to World War Two, it was as if this highly charged arena of contested ideology held the very future of humankind in the balance. Yet it was the chaotic nature of this environment that produced the necessity for a ‘theology of ordinariness’: Bonhoeffer discovered that the church’s greatest weapon against evil is the faithfulness of disciples in their daily living.  

Bonhoeffer realized that sometimes the followship imperative requires what Samuel Wells refers to as the ethics of ‘improvisation’. Rather than trying to maintain a predetermined script of ethical practice, disciples must learn the art of improvising, learning to adopt and embody the character of a disciple of Christ, even if the specifics of a particular context have never been previously

141 Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge, op. cit.*, p. 147, “... not the extraordinary, but rather the completely ordinary, everyday, regular, unobtrusive behaviour (that) is the sign of genuine obedience and genuine humility.”
imagined. Bonhoeffer's own theography is one of improvised followship in a
time of great peril: it is a costly discipleship in a time of cheap grace.

2.1 Theographical Foundations
Bonhoeffer was born into a family of seven children and raised in a nurturing
environment that valued the high culture, historical heritage, and intellectual
traditions of the German bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{143} Although a child of privilege,
Bonhoeffer was not unconcerned about the realities of everyday life. He
inherited from his father, a renowned physician and psychiatrist, the personal
discipline and scholarly rigour that gave shape to his theological calling, and
an insistent realism that characterised much of his writings.\textsuperscript{144} From his
mother Bonhoeffer was gifted a sense of adventure and self-determination:
she was a woman who “regarded mistakes as more forgivable than
boredom”.\textsuperscript{145}

Although the Bonhoeffer family were not regular churchgoers, the church was
considered part of the rich heritage of German culture. The young Bonhoeffer
was thus sent along with his siblings to confirmation classes.\textsuperscript{146} Surprisingly,
Bonhoeffer made the decision to become a minister and theologian as a
young boy and never wavered from that calling. On one occasion, at

\textsuperscript{143} de Gruchy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 23. See also Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 29, where he writes that the
Bonhoeffer family hosted a regular Wednesday evening discussion group on culture and
politics. Attendees included such notables as Adolf Von Harnack and Ernst Troeltsch.
Although Dietrich Bonhoeffer never attended any of these meetings, Bethge suggests they
produced an atmosphere and direction that had an effect on his life.
\textsuperscript{144} Bonhoeffer, D., \textit{Life Together}, London, SCM Press, 1954, p. 8. (Referred to as \textit{LT} from
here on). See also Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 15-16.
\textsuperscript{145} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{146} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 35. For a helpful summary of Bonhoeffer's rich pedigree with the
institutional church, see de Gruchy, \textit{Companion, op. cit.}, p. 23, and also Leibholz's Memoir in
fourteen, he was being teased by his siblings for choosing a vocation of ‘least resistance’ and that the “church to which he proposed to devote himself was a poor, feeble, boring, petty and bourgeois institution”. He replied: ‘In that case I shall reform it!’”  

As a young man Bonhoeffer was interested in theology for its own sake – he understood it as a philosophical discipline, and was intrigued by the possibilities it provided. It was as if the world of ideas that Bonhoeffer inherited from his privileged upbringing demanded more from him than allegiance to German culture and familial expectations. His theography, then, did not concern itself with cultural Christianity’s fascination with religiosity and self-piety, but rather positioned him in such a way that his own faith-journey would lead him to a place of ecclesial transformation. Bethge notes,

"First came the ‘call’, in his youthful vanity to do something special in his life. Then he plunged with intellectual curiosity into theology as a branch of knowledge. Only later did the church enter his field of vision. Unlike theologians who came from families that were active in the church and theology, and discover the existence of the ‘world’ only later, Bonhoeffer embarked on his journey and eventually discovered the church."

It was on a trip to Rome in the summer of 1924 that Bonhoeffer, already a student of theology at Berlin University, developed a deep and abiding love for the church. For the first time he began to wrestle with such concepts as the ‘universal of the ecclesia’ and to think beyond the mere romanticism or idealism of institutionalised church culture. It was later that year, in the

147 Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
148 Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
winter of 1924-25, that Bonhoeffer first encountered Holy Scripture as the Word, through his introduction to the theology of Karl Barth.  

There is no doubt that Barth was the most influential figure in the development of Bonhoeffer’s own theology. Bethge identifies four different stages in their friendship. Bethge identifies four different stages in their friendship. Stage one from 1925-1929 is categorised as the time when Bonhoeffer is introduced to Barth’s thinking and this has a direct influence on his own writing in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. Stage two centres around a series of meetings between the two scholars from 1931 to 1933 where ideas of ecclesial ethics and polity were discussed and debated, and a close mentoring relationship was established. In stage three we find Bonhoeffer striving to find his own theological voice on topics such as justification and sanctification, and yet still working closely with Barth on matters of church politics and strategies for ecclesial reform. Stage four occurs in 1944 when Bonhoeffer begins to reframe the questions of church and world and seeks to find a new language of faith from within the prison walls of Tegel. This is also the point where Bonhoeffer appears to be most critical of what he refers to as Barth’s ‘positivism of revelation’. Yet all the while Bonhoeffer himself saw his own critical appraisal of Barth’s theology from within the circle of Barthian scholarship, not without. Barth’s dialectical approach to theology and his Christocentric emphasis, created the very

150 Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 73. Bonhoeffer would later write that he ‘discovered’ the Bible in 1931 as a great change took place in his life. But there is no doubt that his first encounters with Barth’s theology also had a great impact on his life.


foundation from which Bonhoeffer began to formulate his own methodology.\(^{154}\)

At the same time that Bonhoeffer was discovering Barth’s theology, however, he was also discovering the church, and so the development of Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology is embedded in Christology, and his understanding of Christ is shaped by his continued hope for the community of faith. Bonhoeffer’s theography is one whereby his academic study is in continual dialogue with his lived experience.

Berlin University where Bonhoeffer completed his undergraduate studies was the heart and soul of the Liberal Protestant movement in Germany. Lecturers such as Adolf Harnack, Reinhold Seeberg and Karl Holl equipped the young Bonhoeffer with a solid foundation in philosophical theology and the historical-critical method of exegesis. When it came time to submit a proposal for his dissertation, however, Bonhoeffer sought a dramatic departure from the methodology of his Berlin mentors. Bonhoeffer’s focus on the church as a Christ-formed community bears witness to his growing concern for the German church held captive by culture and tradition, and a shortcoming he perceived in Barth’s theology of a neglect in the revelatory role of the ecclesia as the Body of Christ.\(^{155}\)

Bonhoeffer’s dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, completed in 1927, begins by re-examining the very

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155 Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
nature of personhood. He sets out to refute the predominant Kantian idealism of the academy. For Bonhoeffer, personhood is not grounded in reason (Aristotle); submission to a higher obligation (Stoicism); the pursuit of pleasure (Epicurus); or self-perception (Kant). Instead, he insists that personhood is relational.

The individual exists only in relation to an ‘other’; individual does not mean solitary. On the contrary, for the individual to exist, ‘others’ must necessarily be there.\textsuperscript{156}

This particular understanding of personhood will almost inevitably lead him to consider the very nature of Christian sociality. Bonhoeffer’s theology of the church is also beginning to take shape. Bonhoeffer believes that Christ exists in the world as the church\textsuperscript{157} and the church has authority inasmuch as it rests upon the Word.\textsuperscript{158} The paradox of Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology is coming to the fore, and the ramifications for a hermeneutic of followship are both pervasive and profound. Bonhoeffer insists that Christ is in the world to the extent that the church’s witness is faithful, and yet it is also the presence of Christ in the


\textsuperscript{157} Bonhoeffer, SC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 138. “The church is the presence of Christ in the same way that Christ is the presence of God”. See also Bonhoeffer, CC, \textit{op. cit.}, p11. Bonhoeffer draws on this same notion in his inaugural lecture given at the University of Berlin in 1930: “It is the mystery of the community that Christ is in her and, only through her, reaches men. Christ exists among us as community, as Church in the hiddenness of history. The Church is the hidden Christ among us. Now therefore man is never alone, but he exists only through the community which brings him Christ, which incorporates him in itself, takes him into its life. Man in Christ is man in community; where he exists in community. But because at the same time as individual he is fully a member of the community, therefore here alone is the continuity of his existence preserved in Christ. Therefore man can no longer understand himself from himself, but only from Christ.”

\textsuperscript{158} Bonhoeffer, SC, \textit{op. cit.}, p.250.
world among the poor and the broken that is the greatest witness to the church.\textsuperscript{159}

Although this early work was not well received by the wider academy when it was first published, it was warmly welcomed by Barth who wrote the following tribute in his 1955 publication of \textit{Church Dogmatics}:

I openly confess that I have misgivings whether I can even maintain the high level reached by Bonhoeffer, saying no less in my own words and context, and saying it no less forcefully, than did this young man so many years ago.\textsuperscript{160}

Bonhoeffer spent a year in Barcelona as an Assistant Pastor in 1928, and then returned to Berlin as an assistant lecturer in systematic theology. During this time, Bonhoeffer also wrote his postdoctoral thesis \textit{Act and Being}, which was submitted for the appraisal of the academy in the February of 1930.

Following on from his study of the revelatory characteristics of the church as the Body of Christ explored in \textit{Sanctorum Communio}, \textit{Act and Being} is an examination of the very nature of Divine revelation. Here Bonhoeffer critiques philosophers from Kant through to Heidegger and their attempts to locate truth within the realms of knowledge (whether ontological or phenomenological). Bonhoeffer also criticises various theological endeavours to understand revelation within God's action or being, and instead insists that the Church is the primary place of God's revelation.

\textsuperscript{159} Kelly, G. B., in de Gruchy, J. W. (ed), \textit{Cambridge Companion to Bonhoeffer}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 262. “As early as 1928, when he had to deal with the raw poverty of his people for the first time, he took pains to remind his parishioners that Jesus Christ was among them in the faces of the grubby poor. That continued presence in the Christ living in the least of his brothers and sisters was not something that a church could ignore…”

\textsuperscript{160} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 84. Karl Barth only read Bonhoeffer’s early work after he had been martyred.
Revelation should be thought of only in reference to the concept of the 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. 

Bonhoeffer also began to distance himself from what he considered Barth's reliance on Kantian transcendentalism. Bethge notes,

While the early Barth, desiring to proclaim God's majesty, began by removing him to a remote distance, Bonhoeffer's starting point, inspired by the same desire to proclaim his majesty, brought him into close proximity.

The themes at work and play in both Sanctorum Communio and Act and Being resurface time and again in Bonhoeffer's theology. For Bonhoeffer, Christ is present and active in the gathered community of believers, the Church: and, the Church is only the Church because of Christ's presence and action. Bonhoeffer will later draw on his notion of personhood as being for others, in the formulation of both his Christology and ecclesiology on the same premise. Because Christ is the man for others, so too the Church is only the Church as it is for others.

At the same time that Bonhoeffer was writing his theses on the ontology of the church and what it means to be human, Germany was being torn apart by rising unemployment, political instability, and social unrest. In the midst of this unprecedented social upheaval, Hitler's National Socialist Party began to make political gains. Hitler's impassioned rhetoric filled with patriotic fervour, ethnic and Semitic scapegoating, and religious sloganeering, changed the

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162 Bethge, op. cit., p. 134.
very nature of Germany’s public discourse. At this point, the institutional church was somewhat unsure of what to make of Hitler’s claims to religiosity, and yet, in contrast to the nihilistic fears of Marxism on the one hand, and the deep suspicions of Liberal Democracy on the other, he seemed a far better political option. In terms of epistemology and followship, Bonhoeffer’s thinking should be seen as providing a strong alternative to the seductive power and threat of Hitler’s rhetoric and propaganda.

The exemplary followship we see in Bonhoeffer insists that obedience to the call of Christ demands active resistance to all others who would seek allegiance. This resistance is theological. Because Christ is Lord, the Führer is not. For Bonhoeffer, all of life is theological. And so, his theological studies continue to inform his ethical choices, and his lived experience continues to shape his theology.

2.2 Theographical Upheaval

At face value the next stage in his theography might seem like an interruption or even a detour. Bonhoeffer travelled to New York in 1931 to study at Union Theological Seminary on a twelve-month scholarship. In his opinion the theological state of the seminary was ‘hopeless’. Nevertheless, he enjoyed

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164 Bucher, R., Hitler’s Theology: Religious Space, Theory and Practice, Continuum, London, 2011. p. x “Hitler’s theology is intellectually crude, its racism is abominable and its God is a numinous monster. It harbours no mercy, no charity and thus no peace. But it became – and truly all theology aims to do this – practical.”

165 Bucher, op. cit., p. 6. Bucher laments that the Catholic church had no organized resistance against the Nazi regime in part because they shared the same disdain for Democracy and Liberalism.

166 Bethge, op. cit., p. 158.
the challenge of being an enthusiastic advocate for Barth’s ‘theology of crisis’ as it was first introduced to the United States.

Surprisingly, it was not theological learning that marked Bonhoeffer’s visit to America. It was instead a very pertinent and potent introduction to political theology as ethical discourse. His main teachers, Reinhold Niebuhr and John Baillie, blithely criticised him for what they perceived to be his over-reliance on a theology of transcendence.

Obedience to God’s will may be a religious experience, but it is not an ethical one unless it issues in actions which can be socially valued. 167

It is here that we find the seedbed of Bonhoeffer’s later writing in *Ethics*. Rather than an ethic founded upon universal principles, Bonhoeffer proposes ethical praxis based upon the imperative of Christ’s presence in the world, demanding action that is both relational and contextual. Followship can never be simply abstract, theoretical or disengaged.

Bonhoeffer’s theography continues to develop as a rich tapestry of interwoven theological learnings and life experiences. A pivotal watershed moment occurs in 1931 that changes everything. This revelatory event was his discovery of the Bible. On his return to Germany Bonhoeffer entered into a socio-political powder keg. Before America he had distanced himself from the politics of the academy and the nation, but it now seemed that he could not help but get involved. Bonhoeffer felt isolated within the theological faculty of the University of Berlin, and alone in the church, for “(h)e now began to teach on a faculty whose theology he did not share, and to preach in a church

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whose self confidence he regarded as unfounded.”  

But something happened in his personal life that left an indelible mark. Bethge denied that Bonhoeffer ever referred to it as a ‘conversion experience’. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer wrote a letter to a close friend in 1936 that details this particular time in his life with great passion.

I plunged into work in a very unchristian way. An… ambition that many noticed in me made my life difficult… Then something happened, something that has changed and transformed my life to the present day. For the first time I discovered the Bible… I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the church, spoken and preached about it – but I had not yet become a Christian… I know that at that time I turned the doctrine of Jesus Christ into something of a personal advantage for myself… I pray to God that will never happen again. Also I had never prayed, or prayed only very little. For all my loneliness, I was quite pleased with myself. Then the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount, freed me from that. Since then, everything has changed. I have felt this plainly, and so have other people about me. It was a great liberation. It became clear to me that the life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the Church, and step by step it became clearer to me how far that must go… My calling is clear to me. What God will make of it I do not know… I must follow the path.  

This reference to ‘following the path’ is critical. It attracted an imperative – a transcendent ‘I must’. Followship is no longer a choice for Bonhoeffer; theology is no longer an intellectual pursuit, church membership is no longer a religious practice. Bonhoeffer understands his vocation as intrinsic to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the cross that awaits.

168 Bethge, op. cit., p. 173. See also Moses, J. A., “Bonhoeffer’s Germany: The Political Context”, in de Gruchy, Companion, op. cit., pp. 3-21. The German theologians of the Berlin faculty were more interested in the God of history than the God of the Bible. Bonhoeffer’s theological teachers (Harnack and Seeberg) were supporters of German’s imperialism and militarism and provided theological backing. For Harnack and others, German foreign policy equated to the Kingdom of God on earth. They were guardians of Germany’s cultural heritage, and saw preservation of Germany’s elite international status as the work of God.


And so, in the late summer of 1931, when Bonhoeffer travelled to Bonn for his first meeting with Karl Barth, there was more at stake than theological curiosity and intellectual debate. Bonhoeffer had already been greatly influenced by Barth’s theology, but Barth knew nothing of Bonhoeffer.\textsuperscript{171} These two great theologians came from very different origins. Bonhoeffer's ancestry was from the upper classes of the German cultural elite, and he had been schooled in the Liberal Theology of Harnack, Barth’s fiercest opponent.\textsuperscript{172} Barth came from a Swiss-German working class background and his dialectical theology, waged against the Philosophical Theology of Protestant Liberalism, was still treated with great suspicion in Berlin. At the time of their first meeting, however, both theologians were in a time of transition.

Barth had left the pulpit for the lectern. His questions and answers at the lectern had emerged from his experience as a preacher; the preacher in turn had needed the systematician. To rescue God’s majesty from being squandered from the pulpit, Barth spoke of the Wholly Other, the remote and unapproachable God. Thus Barth pondered how to avoid making this an unholy confusing concept in the concrete reality. Bonhoeffer, however, came from a predominantly academic environment; secretly he had long aspired to the pulpit. He was systematician searching for the preacher. In direct contrast to Barth, Bonhoeffer concentrated on the terrifying proximity of an actively intervening God to preserve the majesty of God from being cheapened in the pulpit, and sought to proclaim him in the concreteness of grace-filled commandment. The man who faced the master was still in part a systematician, but he was also a preacher pondering the authority and credibility of his proclamation. The old questions were fading into the background.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{171} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 179.

\textsuperscript{172} The relationship between Barth and Harnack was not always so acrimonious. See in particular Hunsinger, G., \textit{Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth}, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids Michigan, 2000, p. 319. “… Barth soon came to think more highly of Harnack than of any other professor. Attaching himself to the great theologian as a pupil, he became the youngest regular member of Harnack's seminar in church history, in which he worked in great diligence. Harnack regarded Barth as a promising student.”

\textsuperscript{173} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 182.
There is no doubt that his conversations with Barth over the next few years were invaluable to the formation processes of Bonhoeffer’s own theology. But Bonhoeffer also valued Barth as a dear friend and mentor. As Bethge writes, “there was no contemporary to whom Bonhoeffer opened his heart so completely as he did to Karl Barth.”

Bonhoeffer’s theography repeatedly emphasises this significance of others for the life of followship. The importance of this cannot be underestimated. It is not just a case of Bonhoeffer finding potential allies in the struggle against Nazism and the German Church, for Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology is not confined to what merely happens to be before him. His ecumenism enables him to grasp an understanding of the church that transcends time and place. Now and then intimations of what he would regard as a Christian community make themselves felt in gatherings in which he himself participates, and yet there is a sense that he is continually looking for that which lies beyond his reach.

On his return to lecturing at the University of Berlin Bonhoeffer attracts a following of loyal students. The Bonhoeffer Circle met for theological discussion, prayer and fellowship and from this small community, the origins of Finkenwalde can be found. Bonhoeffer also immersed himself in the newly emerging ecumenical movement and forged relationships that sustained him through the turbulent years ahead. There is no surviving record of Bonhoeffer’ original lecture notes during this time, except for the publication of

174 Bethge, op. cit., p. 186.
his theological exegesis of Genesis 1-3, found in *Creation and Fall*. From notes taken by students during his Christology lectures in the summer of 1933, the publication *Christ the Centre* later emerged. Bonhoeffer believed this lecture series on Christology was the high point of his academic career.

Bonhoeffer’s Christology is at the heart of his theography and provides the theological foundation for the followship imperative. The story of Bonhoeffer’s life is continually shaped by his uncompromising obedience to the call of Christ, which can be seen in the confessional nature of his personal correspondence to friends and family, and also in his public stand against the theology of the Liberal Protestants, and the burgeoning National Socialist agenda. In the same way, his approach to ecclesiology, Biblical studies, and ethics are also informed by a Christological hermeneutic that is both transformative and pervasive.

Now it is at this point that his earlier commitment to a ‘theology of crisis’ begins to manifest itself in increasingly difficult life situations. A theology of crisis has a strong sense of God as the Wholly Other; it conveys elements of judgment and a call to obedience. Bonhoeffer’s Christology lies at the heart of this theology of crisis. It is coming to its maturity at a time when Hitler’s power is on the brink of becoming totalitarian.

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175 In *Creation and Fall* Bonhoeffer rejects the analogy of being (analogia entis) for an analogy of relation (analogia relationis) as does Karl Barth in *Church Dogmatics III/2*. The consistency of Bonhoeffer’s theology can be seen here in relation to his understanding of personhood as previously discussed. Bonhoeffer’s insistence of the ‘orders of preservation’ in contrast to the ‘orders of creation’ is also first seen at this point. Bonhoeffer, D., *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 140. (Referred to as CF from here on).
On January 30 1933, Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany. Everything changed. On February 27, the Reichstag building was burned to the ground by an act of arson. On February 28, Hitler declared the ‘Reich President’s Edict for the Protection of People and State’. This resulted in the systematic persecution of those who were publicly opposed to the Nazi party and the removal of personal freedoms and civil rights for the general population. On March 23, the Enabling Act was passed by the government, which in effect ended democracy in Germany and gave Hitler ultimate authority as dictator. Persecution of the Jews had already begun, and by September, the Aryan Clause was passed before the General Synod of the German Protestant Church. 177

Hitler’s agenda was as theological as it was ideological. 178 As Rainer Bucher explains, “To Hitler, then, the ultimate and only convincing evidence of the legitimacy of his political project is the proof of its divine legitimation!” 179 The all-pervasive nature of his programme required an opposition that was just as comprehensive – one that included theological underpinning.

Bonhoeffer was one of the first theologians to speak out against Hitler. In a radio address delivered two days after Hitler’s inauguration, Bonhoeffer dramatically criticized the idea of Führer as leader. The danger for Germany, as Bonhoeffer saw it, was that should the new leader,

177 The Aryan Clause prevented people from non-Aryan decent from holding office in the church. See Moses, J. A., in de Gruchy, Companion, op. cit., p. 20. It was because of the doctrine on the two kingdoms that the confessing church made its stand. When the Nazi government brought in legislation prohibiting people of Jewish ancestry from public service (including the church), this was seen as an attempt to legislate who could be baptized and so was vehemently opposed.
178 See in particular Bucher, op. cit.
179 See in particular Bucher, op. cit., p. 40.
Bonhoeffer realized that the determinative aspect of followship was ‘who’ we are following. It is Christ who shapes those who would follow. And it is Christ who demands total allegiance. There is no place for Pharaoh, or Caesar, or Führer. And so to follow Christ means to actively resist any other who would seek to take his place.

It was obvious that his theology was increasingly being informed by his socio-political context. In a paper he presented to the Jacobi Circle, a group of pastors and theologians who gathered together for theological reflection, Bonhoeffer outlined his understanding of the relationship between the church and the state in times of state-oppression.

In the first place (the Church) can ask the state whether its actions are legitimate and accordance with its character as state; i.e., it can throw the state back on its responsibility. Secondly, it can aid the victims of state action. The church has an unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to Christian community (!) The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to jam a spoke in the wheel itself.¹⁸¹

In April of 1934 the Barmen Declaration was signed by the newly formed Confessing Church. Under the primary authorship of Barth, the Barmen Declaration rejected what it called ‘false teachings’ of the state-affiliated...
Protestant Church (known as the German Christians). It did so on purely theological grounds. There was no mention of the church's treatment of the Jewish people, or any overt political reference to Hitler or the Nazis. Bonhoeffer was in England at the time working to gain credibility and support for the Confessing Church through the ecumenical movement, and so could not be at the Barmen Conference. Whereas an omission of the ‘Jewish Problem’ in the final draft of the Barmen Declaration greatly disappointed Bonhoeffer,\(^{182}\) he did believe the agreement was a positive step forward. Bonhoeffer did not see the Confessing Church as merely an ‘opposition’ movement within the German church, but rather as a ‘new beginning’ for the church that could provide hope for the future.\(^{183}\)

The church’s struggle in opposition to state tyranny was at the forefront of Bonhoeffer’s mind when in 1935 he answered the call and returned from England to Germany to commence work as director of the illegal *Finkenwalde* Theological Seminary for the Confessing Church. Because of a loophole in the formation process of ordinands in the German Protestant Churches, underground seminaries such as *Finkenwalde* did not come under state scrutiny in the same way the universities did.\(^ {184}\) This regulatory ambiguity allowed Bonhoeffer surprising freedoms he would not have otherwise enjoyed.

\(^{182}\) Bonhoeffer, *NRS*, *op. cit.*, p. 225. "What is at stake is by no means the question whether our German members of congregations can still tolerate church fellowship with the Jews. It is rather the task of Christian preaching to say: here is the church, where Jew and German stand together under the Word of God; here is the proof whether a church is still the church or not".

\(^{183}\) Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

\(^{184}\) Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 420.
Bonhoeffer's classic text informing the followship imperative is *Nachfolge* (German: Following After).\textsuperscript{185} Unlike his previous publications, his seminal thesis on followship was not written within the walls of the academy. Its origins lay in the midst of costly discipleship and state persecution. Immersed in the community life of Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer's earlier theological assertions moved from theory into practice. In Rome Bonhoeffer discovered a love for the church. In the United States he encountered the challenges and opportunities of political discourse in theology. In conversations with Barth he discovered the primacy of the Word. In Berlin he began to formulate his Christology. But it was at Finkenwalde, in writing *Life Together* and the *Nachfolge*, that Bonhoeffer discovered the potency of a lived theology. Here is where Bonhoeffer's theography finds its nexus.\textsuperscript{186} According to Bethge, *Nachfolge* produced “the most profound idea ever expressed by Bonhoeffer: discipleship as participation in Christ’s suffering for others, as communion with the Crucified One”.\textsuperscript{187}

The exemplary significance of these two texts cannot be ignored. *Nachfolge*, first published in English as *Cost of Discipleship*, is how Bonhoeffer was introduced to the English-speaking world. Here Bonhoeffer denounces the ‘cheap grace’ of the German Christian Church and wrestles with the uncompromising demands of followship found in the Beatitudes of Christ and

\textsuperscript{185} Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., (1937) was originally published in English as *The Cost of Discipleship* (1966) and has subsequently been titled *Discipleship* (2003). To avoid confusion I will refer to the original German title, *Nachfolge*, literally translated as *Following After*. It was from this title, that I originally coined the phrase *followship*.
\textsuperscript{186} See also Nelson, F. B., “The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer” pp. 22-49, in de Gruchy, *Companion*, op. cit., p. 30. Nelson writes that Bonhoeffer’s life and theology seemed to converge during the summer of 1936 when he was lecturing in Christology at the University of Berlin. It was here that Bonhoeffer’s opposition to Hitler was beginning to take shape in the public arena.
\textsuperscript{187} Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 456.
the Sermon on the Mount. For Bonhoeffer, these ancient texts are not mere spiritualised allegory, but rather a manifesto for the followship imperative. *Life Together* is written as the companion text to *Nachfolge*. Here Bonhoeffer painstakingly describes the spiritual disciplines necessary for the followship community. Whereas *Nachfolge* exegetes Matthew’s gospel as a descriptor of followship, *Life Together* exegetes the followship community itself as an exemplar of the presence of Christ in the world.

The Confessing Church was heading toward confrontation with Hitler that would eventually become its undoing. Under the leadership of Friedrich Werner, pressure was building for the Confessing Church to fall into line with other Christian denominations and offer a ‘loyalty oath’ to Hitler. Bonhoeffer was adamant that this must not happen. For the Christian allegiance can only ever be offered to Christ. An oath of loyalty to Hitler was apostasy. Bonhoeffer was fighting a losing battle, and his relationship with the Confessing church was becoming more and more strained. In the autumn of 1937, the Gestapo closed down Finkenwalde Seminary, which led to the publication of *Life Together* for wider readership. From 1938-1940 Bonhoeffer headed up an apprentice-training scheme for pastors called ‘collective pastorates’ to replace the Finkenwalde Seminary, and continued to train ministers for the Confessing Church. In 1938, however, the Confessing Church approved *en masse* the oath of loyalty to Hitler on the occasion of his birthday. Bonhoeffer was heartbroken. Bethge writes, “Bonhoeffer was ashamed of the Confessing Church the way one feels shame for a scandal in

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188 Floyd, W. W., *in de Gruchy, Companion, op. cit.*, p. 82.
189 Bethge, *op. cit.*, pp. 596-607. Bethge refers to this time as the ‘low point of the church struggle’.
one’s own family.”\textsuperscript{190} By March of 1940, as war raged across Western Europe, the Gestapo closed down what was left of the collective pastorates and the remaining seminarians were summoned to military service.

Bonhoeffer feared being drafted into Hitler’s army himself. In 1939 he accepted an invitation to go to the United States for a second time. Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Lehman and others had arranged for Bonhoeffer to conduct a lecture tour, teach a summer course at Union Theological Seminary, and serve as a pastor to German refugees. Bonhoeffer travelled via England where he once more invested time and energy into his ecumenical work, and rallied support for the Confessing Church’s struggle against Hitler. On arrival in America, however, the conditions of Bonhoeffer’s duties became more apparent. The proposal that he serve as a pastor to German refugees was a three-year appointment that would prevent Bonhoeffer from returning to Germany. He was beginning to feel a strong conviction to return to his homeland as an act of solidarity. In a letter written to Niebuhr Bonhoeffer declared that,

\begin{quote}
I have made a mistake coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our nation’s history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people… Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security.\textsuperscript{191}
\end{quote}

The theography of Bonhoeffer’s life brings him to the point of choice. He will later write in \textit{Ethics} that followers of Christ do not choose between what they

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\textsuperscript{190} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 603. \\
\textsuperscript{191} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 655.
\end{flushright}
deem to be good or evil, but rather between obedience to Christ or abandoning their faith. Bonhoeffer returned to Europe on July 7, 1939, on the last ship to cross the Atlantic before the outbreak of the Second World War.

It is evident then that the path of followship necessarily creates difficult choices. Some of those choices may be seen as critical – indeed representative of a crisis. They attract an either-or dimension to them and one way has to be selected. Yet for Bonhoeffer, there is but one choice – following Christ. The dilemma for the disciple is to discern what this looks like in each time and place.

2.3 Theographical Crisis.

On his homecoming to Germany Bonhoeffer was persuaded by his brother-in-law Hans Von Dohanyi to become a civilian member of the Abwehr (the counter intelligence agency of the German military) through which he also joined the resistance movement against the Nazis. Bonhoeffer’s allies within the Abwehr convinced the Gestapo that his international contacts established through the ecumenical movement would be invaluable for gathering intelligence to assist the German war effort. Bonhoeffer and the other conspirators used these contacts to establish a network of sympathizers who assisted in the smuggling of Jews out of Germany, and to garner international support for the resistance. It was during these turbulent years, as Bonhoeffer worked as a double agent against his homeland, that he wrote the bulk of what he imagined would be his magnum corpus, his Ethics.

192 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 21. “The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge.”
A dramatic change occurred once more in Bonhoeffer’s life. In 1931-32, Bonhoeffer underwent the dramatic transformation from theologian to Christian as previously discussed; in 1939 he became what Bethge refers to as a ‘man for his times’. Bonhoeffer realised that his commitment to Christ meant that he had to be fully engaged in the world in which he lived. His call as a disciple was to be for others as a consequence of being for Christ. Just as Christ was in the world reconciling it to Himself, the vocation of the disciple was to follow in these footsteps. Bonhoeffer took upon himself the burden of responsibility to join with those who were willing to pay the ultimate price for the collective sins of the German nation and begin working towards the future. Bonhoeffer joined the resistance movement as an act of solidarity with those who were willing to take sin upon themselves for the sake of others. “In 1932 he found his calling, in 1939 his destiny.”

Bonhoeffer’s theography reaches a crisis point. His academic writing from Berlin and discipleship reflections from Finkenwalde, enjoined with his political resistance, culminated in a radicalisation of his Christology. Faced with a present and immanent incarceration and possible death, Bonhoeffer’s journey of followship raises the question, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ This is his Gethsemane. Bonhoeffer takes upon himself the ‘responsibility of vicarious action’ (Stellvertretung) and costly love as he takes part in a conspiracy

195 Mark 8:29.
196 Bonhoeffer’s use of Stellvertretung has been translated in a number of ways such as ‘deputyship’ or vicarious representative action’, but all of these attempts prove to be somewhat problematic. The English terms have a more formal, or legal connotation than the original German suggests. See in particular Green, op. cit., p. 56. “For Bonhoeffer, Christ the Stellvertreter is the initiator and reality of the new humanity. The person and action of Christ is ‘vicarious’ in that he does for human beings what they cannot possible do for themselves.”
against Hitler and the German government. For Bonhoeffer, this is what it means to live as Christ: to be willing to pay the price for the sins of others.

In the midst of the existential trauma he experienced negotiating the path of followship during this dark time, he was also unexpectedly emboldened by a blossoming romantic relationship. Bonhoeffer fell in love. On 13 January 1943 he was engaged to Maria Von Wedemeyer who, at eighteen years, was only half the age of her fiancé. A few weeks later on April 5, Bonhoeffer was arrested and imprisoned at Tegel for suspected involvement in a conspiracy to undermine the Third Reich.  

Bonhoeffer’s time at Tegel included various periods of gruelling interrogation and deliberations on legal strategy. It also provided time for him to meditate on the Scriptures and to further his work on theology. Bonhoeffer managed to smuggle letters to his life-long friend Eberhard Bethge which outlined his thinking. These were later published as Letters and Papers from Prison. From these letters the post-war western world was introduced to such phrases as ‘religionless’ or ‘secular Christianity’ and a ‘world come of age’. Bethge is quick to point out that these phrases are all too often taken out of context; nor do they refer to some sort of rejection of the Christian faith, or even a new direction in Bonhoeffer’s theology, but rather a continuation of the

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197 Moses, J. A., in de Gruchy, Companion, op. cit., pp. 3-21. Bonhoeffer’s reasons for participating in the attempted assassination of Hitler were very different to those of the military.
work that Bonhoeffer had already begun.\textsuperscript{199} The major question that Bonhoeffer seeks to address here is, “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?”\textsuperscript{200} This is the critical question that lies behind the anatomy of Christian followship. It is the transcendent question, ‘who is Jesus Christ’? We say a lot about ourselves in the response. This question calls us to look at our own context. And what following actually means in each person’s here and now. During his time in Tegel, Bonhoeffer’s adherence to ‘costly grace’ and uncompromising allegiance to Christ described in Nachfolge set him on a collusion course with the pragmatic brutality of Nazi Germany. As an exemplar of followship, Bonhoeffer’s unwavering commitment is not sermonized in the pulpit or theorized in the academy, but realized in his faithful obedience to the way of the cross.

On 8 October 1944, Bonhoeffer was transferred from Tegel Prison to the Military Interrogation Prison at the Reich Central Security Office. He was now under the control of the Gestapo. Hope for his release had all but faded. On Sunday April 8 1945, Bonhoeffer led his fellow inmates in a celebration of the Eucharist at the Flossenbürg extermination camp, and in the ‘gray dawn’ of the following day he was executed. The camp doctor saw Bonhoeffer on the morning of his execution but did not realise it was him until years later.

Through the half open door in one room of the huts I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this unusually loveable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brace and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost

\textsuperscript{199} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 863. See also Bonhoeffer, \textit{CC}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 20. \textsuperscript{200} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LPP}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 279.
fifty years that I have worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.\textsuperscript{201} It is perhaps only fitting that at this point in Bonhoeffer’s theography we find a parallel with the witness of the centurion at the foot of the cross.\textsuperscript{202} Even in death Bonhoeffer is faithful to the Lordship of Christ. For Bonhoeffer knew that it is only in the act of following Christ that we discover what we truly believe. It is our lived story that demonstrates our theology. Theography and followship are intrinsic to one another. But of course the followship imperative is also one that insists upon the hope of resurrection. And so it is that we find in the story of Bonhoeffer a theological legacy that continues to inspire, confront and challenge, and an exemplar of followship and witness to the way of Christ. Bonhoeffer sought to follow Christ in his own here and now – despite the pervasive evil of his context. We are called to do the same. It is only in our own here and now that followship can be realized.

The task before Bonhoeffer thus remains the task before us, just as his question to his friends is also ours: ‘The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is not how he is to extricate himself historically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live. It is only from this question, with its responsibility towards history, that fruitful solutions can come.’\textsuperscript{203}

Because of the unfinished nature of much of his work, and the contextual emphasis on his understanding of ethics, Bonhoeffer’s theology has often

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{201} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 927.
\item \textsuperscript{202} Mark 15:39. “Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was God's Son!’”
\item \textsuperscript{203} Rasmussen, L., in de Gruchy, \textit{Companion, op. cit.}, p. 223.
\end{itemize}
been championed by leading proponents of opposing views. His writing, although at times fragmented, should be read as part of a wider schema. It is my contention that Bonhoeffer’s theology is a lived theology. His approaches to Christology, ethics and discipleship are best understood as attempts to incarnate the love of God through a realised theology in a world come of age.

On July 21, the day after the attempt on Hitler’s life failed, Bonhoeffer wrote in a letter to Eberhard Bethge:

I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. I suppose I wrote (Nachfolge) as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote. I discovered later, and I’m still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a church-man (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous person or an unrighteous one, a sick or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life’s duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith: that is metanoia; and that is how one becomes a human being, a Christian.

The careful reading of Bonhoeffer’s writings will show how this vocation of discipleship has both emerged and developed. The origins of his mature

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204 See de Gruchy, op. cit. In particular, pp. 93-109 outline contrasting views on the reception of Bonhoeffer’s theology in the English speaking world.
205 See also Wüstenberg, op. cit.
206 Bonhoeffer, D., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 8: Letters and Papers from Prison*, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 2010, p. 542. (This particular translation of Letters and Papers from Prison will be referred to as *DBWE Vol 8* from here on).
thinking lie in his early writings. They will set about putting in place the type of script that Wells says we need to rehearse and improvise upon. With the benefit of hindsight it is evident though that Bonhoeffer did not begin with the imperative of followship and the grammar of discipleship. What was most pressing for him was the need to interpret the meaning of the church and what it meant to be a human person. Now these themes may seem to be at a remove from the core purpose of this thesis. Bonhoeffer’s texts at this point are not overtly concentrating on the cost of discipleship. Nevertheless, there emphases are critical for the development of a realised theology of discipleship because we are not called to follow as lonely atomistic individuals. Bonhoeffer’s work on the church will show that followship is relational and must necessarily involve participating with the other. Furthermore, that the call to be a disciple, and the call to follow, is a journey into authentic selfhood and personhood. It is for these reasons his writings require further exegesis.
Chapter Three:

On Being a Follower

Bonhoeffer’s academic writings from 1925-1930 provide the foundations for his later theology. They reveal the academic rigour validating the development of his understanding of followship. Bonhoeffer’s Christological assertions of Christ being-for-others,\(^\text{207}\) and his ecclesiological demands of the Church as the body of Christ taking up space in the world,\(^\text{208}\) begin here. The dynamic and correlative relationship between Christology and ecclesiology intrinsic to so much of Bonhoeffer’s theology, are seen gestating into thought patterns that will later become a realized followship imperative.\(^\text{209}\)

Bonhoeffer concerns himself firstly with the very nature of the church and what it means to be community with one another in *Sanctorum Communio*. The very nature of our humanity is dealt with in *Act and Being*. Writing against the threat-filled background of a newly emerging National Socialism engulfing Germany, it is not an overstatement to insist that the practical instantiation of these core theological beliefs were being called into question in the political turmoil of his day. For Hitler’s project had its own implicit theology that sought to define and dictate, not only the pragmatism of polity,

\(^{209}\) Bethge, op. cit., p. 84. "(E)cclesiology dominated Bonhoeffer’s theology in its early years, Absorbing Christology. Later the reverse became true… (T)his preliminary organization of his ideas served as a barrier against metaphysical speculation and a transcendental evaporation of the idea of God. Although distant, God was the close and concrete encounter with one’s fellows. Faith was the bond with the community; to be human was possible with fellowship. Although his theological language would change, Bonhoeffer held fast to these ideas." See also Migliore, *op. cit.*, Kindle Location 5274, where Migliore advocates a Trinitarian approach to ecclesiology.
but also the story of belonging.\textsuperscript{210} As Hitler began to articulate a narrative of providence and calling that sought to distinguish the German people from all others as predestined for greatness,\textsuperscript{211} Bonhoeffer seeks instead to find a language that unites humanity in its standing before God. Bonhoeffer’s doctoral writings contain the essential ingredients of a theology that will eventually put him on a collision course with Hitler’s National Socialist agenda.

\subsection*{3.1 Sanctorum Communio (The Communion of Saints)}

The Church is God’s new will and purpose for humanity.\textsuperscript{212} The church is the presence of Christ in the same way that Christ is the presence of God.\textsuperscript{213}

\textit{The Sanctorum Communio: a Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church (The Communion of Saints)} was completed in July 1927, less than two years after Bonhoeffer began his doctoral work. Here Bonhoeffer seeks to create a ‘conceptual connection’ between theology and sociology, and, in doing so he leans heavily on the side of theology.\textsuperscript{214} In this way, his methodology is reminiscent of Barth’s dialectical approach relating to a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[210] See in particular, Bucher, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 88. Bucher identifies the German people’s longing for an ‘identity myth’.
\item[211] Bucher, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 49-57.
\item[212] Bonhoeffer, SC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 141.
\item[213] Bonhoeffer, SC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 139.
\item[214] Bonhoeffer, SC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 22, “The goal of the following ecclesiological study is a dogmatic-theological reflection on the concept of the church in light of insights from social philosophy and sociology… The dogmatic character of the work prevails; both disciplines of social science are to be made fruitful for theology.” See also Plant, S., \textit{Bonhoeffer}, Continuum, London, 2004, p. 68, where he cites the critique of the sociologist Peter Berger that the dialogue in \textit{Sanctorium Communio} is one “between social philosophy and dogmatic theology, both are operating on levels of distraction safely removed from the harshness of empirical data.”
\end{footnotes}
theology of revelation: Barth’s influence is noticeable throughout the dissertation.\textsuperscript{215} Bonhoeffer creates a critical distance between himself and the great Swiss Reformed theologian, however, by drawing upon Karl Holl’s Lutheran ecclesiology and identifying the church-community as the location of revelation.\textsuperscript{216} For Bonhoeffer Christology and ecclesiology are inseparable.\textsuperscript{217}

Bonhoeffer understands the sociology of religion as a ‘study of the structural distinctiveness of religious communities’.\textsuperscript{218} He firmly believes that,

> The nature of the church can only be understood from within… never by nonparticipants. Only those who take the claim of the church seriously – not relativizing it in relation to other similar claims or their own rationality, but viewing it from the standpoint of the gospel – can possibly glimpse something of its true nature.\textsuperscript{219}

Bonhoeffer insists that the Sanctorum Communio is a unique social phenomenon. It can not simply be subsumed by the existing sociological typologies of his day.\textsuperscript{220}

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\textsuperscript{215} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 3. “In his evaluation, Reinhold Seeburg, Bonhoeffer’s doctoral adviser, wrote of the allusions to Barth that he found in some terminology of the dissertation. But Bonhoeffer’s alignment with Barth was much stronger than Seeberg recognized – the dissertation displays not mere allusions to Barth but rather a fundamental commitment to the method of a theology of revelation.”
\textsuperscript{216} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 293. Bonhoeffer expands this thinking comprehensively in Act and Being.
\textsuperscript{217} Marsh, Reclaiming op. cit., p. 101. Marsh maintains that ‘Christ existing as community’ is one of the principal axioms found throughout all of Bonhoeffer’s writings.
\textsuperscript{218} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 31
\textsuperscript{219} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 33. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 63. “What Bonhoeffer seeks… is not to examine personhood and personal relations, or community as such, but to unlock a Christian concept of personhood and community.”
\textsuperscript{220} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 31. Bonhoeffer constantly distinguishes himself from the sociological theories of Max Weber and others (such as Ernst Troeltsch) throughout his thesis. See also Bethge, op. cit., p. 83. “Bonhoeffer… aimed at nothing less than bringing together his divergent heritages: to bring sociology and the critical tradition into harmony with the theology of revelation, that is, to reconcile Troeltsch and Barth.”
\end{flushleft}
3.1.1 The Person

Bonhoeffer believes the “concepts of person, community and God are inseparably and essentially related”. The nature of this relationship leads him to examine the Christian concept of person as an entry point to a wider discussion on what he refers to as the ‘four conceptual models of social-basic relation’. The first is the Aristotelian model whereby human beings become persons insofar as they partake of reason; that is followed by the Stoic model where human beings become persons through subordination to a higher imperative; the third type is Epicurean where individuals are fulfilled by seeking pleasure (but are deficient in the concept of spirit, and are alienated from each other); and, finally, the fourth relies upon the Enlightenment idealist tradition derived from Descartes and Kant where the person in universalized.

It is against the idealist tradition that Bonhoeffer concentrates his critique. Bonhoeffer rejects the idealist universality of the concept of person (and spirit) by locating persons in time. For Bonhoeffer persons are dynamic, and the ethical dilemmas they face are not abstract or metaphysical – but concrete and real. Kantian Idealism says that ‘because one can one ought’, but this formulation is far removed from the ‘ethical barriers’ that exist in reality. By way of contrast, Bonhoeffer believes that it is in the moment of confrontation and response that the ethical person ‘arises’.

221 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 34.
222 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 36-43.
223 See also Marsh, op. cit., p. 70. “Although the principal conversation in Sanctorum Communio regarding the relation to the other is carried with Hegel, the theme of the fracture between sociality and epistemology (which Bonhoeffer advances) is folded into the conversation of the entire transcendental tradition of the subject. This conversation refers to that narrative he calls the ‘metaphysical scheme’.”
224 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 45.
It is a Christian insight that the person as conscious being is created in the moment of being moved – in the situation of responsibility, passionate ethical struggle, confrontation by an overwhelming claim; thus the real person grows out of the concrete situation... For Christian Philosophy, the human person originates only in relation to the divine; the divine person transcends the human person, who both resists and is overwhelmed by the divine. Idealist individualism’s notion of spirit as being-for-itself is unchristian, as it involves attributing to the human spirit absolute value that can only be ascribed to divine spirit. The Christian person originates only in the absolute duality of God and humanity; only in experiencing the barrier does awareness of oneself as ethical person arise. The more clearly the barrier is perceived, the more deeply the person enters into the situation of responsibility.225

For Bonhoeffer ethical persons only exist in relation to the responsibility that they have for one another.226 The barrier between different persons, and between persons and God, is determinative of an I-You divide.227 A person can only know themselves as an ‘I’, and only know the other as a ‘You’. The concepts of I and You are not interchangeable. Because of this essential barrier, persons can not fully know each other, but can only acknowledge and believe in the other (that they encounter as You).228 Although the I and You come into being in relation to one another, Bonhoeffer is careful to reject the notion of one creating the other in any ontological sense.

God, or the Holy Spirit joins the concrete You; only through God’s active working does the other become a You to me from

225 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 49. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 64. “Ethics begins with the realization that I can never be you; that the social barrier between us is at the same time an ethical barrier.” (Emphasis in original).
226 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 50. See also Marsh, op. cit., p. 69. “In ethical encounter, we recognize that the source of our relations resides neither on the side of the subject or on the side of the object but in the space of the relational in between.”
227 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 5 ⇒ (editor’s introduction) ⇒ Even though there are similarities between Buber (I-Thou) and Bonhoeffer, their thinking draws on different philosophical traditions and whereas Buber emphasizes the need for intimacy – Bonhoeffer is more interested in the ethical encounter that occurs between people... For further discussion on Buber’s thoughts in relation to Bonhoeffer’s see Marsh, op. cit., pp 75-76, and Green, C., “Human Sociality and Christian Community”, pp. 113-133, in de Gruchy, Companion, op. cit.
228 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 54.
whom my I arises. In other words, every human You is an image of the divine You.\textsuperscript{229}

Bonhoeffer argues that we can only ever experience the divine in You-form (although God is not really a You, because God is not dependent on another I). Therefore community is the primary way we experience the divine, both as God in You-form, and other persons as the divine image of God (again in You-form). Such experience is not meant to imply that community somehow negates the importance of the individual person (as with Kantian idealism and its notion of universalism),\textsuperscript{230} but rather, community creates the context of the person as image bearer of the divine.

\textit{…(l)n some way, the individual belongs essentially and absolutely with the other, according to God’s will, even though, or precisely because, the one is completely separate from the other.}\textsuperscript{231}

Our relationships with other persons are located within our relationship with God.\textsuperscript{232} Thus, community itself takes on a sacred role and identity.

The implications here for our understanding of followship, are both essential and permeating. To be a follower of Christ, is not something that can be

\textsuperscript{229}Bonhoeffer, SC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 55. See also Plant, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 64. “Genuine ethical responsibility becomes possible, Bonhoeffer claims, when God assume the place of the ‘You’ in the I-You encounter, making it possible for the I to recognize the needs of the other.”

\textsuperscript{230}Plant, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 49, Plant writes about Bonhoeffer’s disagreement with Kierkegaard in relation to his dealings with individualism, community and Kant. “Kierkegaard’s ‘Fear and Trembling’ proposes that the individual is higher than the community. The consequence of this is that in the duty to love one’s neighbour it is not God we meet, but merely the neighbour, since our duty to God can cause us to ‘suspend’ our ethical obligation to our neighbour. For Bonhoeffer, the choice between God and Neighbour was false because God meets us in our neighbour. It was true, for Bonhoeffer, that Kierkegaard had correctly turned away from Kant in presenting a critique of philosophical ethics from the Biblical point of view: but Kierkegaard had wrongly followed Kant in making the individual central to ethics. For Bonhoeffer... individuals meet God in community, not in isolated individualism.”

\textsuperscript{231}Bonhoeffer, SC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{232}Bonhoeffer, SC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 56. See also Marsh, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 91-96. On p. 95 Marsh looks at a theme that runs throughout Bonhoeffer’s writing that, “all genuine relations to others are mediated through Christ.”
contemplated as an individual endeavor, and conversely, as we encounter true community, we discover the presence of Christ therein. Marsh further explains this relational understanding of Christian identity within the community of believers when he writes,

The self becomes itself in Christ, for Christ exists as the luminescence of agapeic togetherness. In life for and with others, the person becomes what he or she is intended to be by becoming more than what he or she is in overabundant love. This is not empty rhetoric or mere moral admonition but a way of conceiving the deepest transformation of what it means to be human.233

Relationships that are not formed in Christ, that is, relationships that are not for-others-as-persons, are in danger of idolatry: being-for that which takes the place of Christ. The rise of National Socialism in Germany at this time gives testimony to this danger. Bucher asserts that Hitler urged members of the National Socialist movement to be as committed to their project of national reform and international conquest, as Christians were to their God.234 The stakes were high. Bonhoeffer’s definition of personhood could not be more critical.

Bonhoeffer’s next challenge is to locate his definition of the Christian person within the reality of community as it is experienced in life. Again, his concern is to contrast his thesis with the abstract notions of personhood emphasized by Kantian idealism.235 For the sake of the argument Bonhoeffer refers to what he calls the primal state. For Bonhoeffer, the primal state refers to humankind’s original existence before God as opposed to humankind’s existence before God after the Fall: it can only be understood theologically,

233 Marsh, op. cit., p. 151.
234 Bucher, op. cit., p. 21.
235 See also Plant, op. cit., p. 45. See also Wüstenberg, op. cit., 7. “(I)ndividualism is the basic error of Protestant theology.”
and thus only through revelation. Correctly understood, primal state is an eschatological concept for it also refers to the restoration and reconciliation of all of creation – it is hope projected backwards.236

Even though the primal state is a theological concept, its importance is recognized because of its claim on history. Unlike Kantian idealism which understands concepts of sin and salvation in abstract terms, Bonhoeffer’s theory of the primal state insists that sin has entered into history and thus can only be understood in concrete terms. The Christian understanding of personhood is located in a world broken by sin and, as such, personhood is broken by sin. Just as community with God before the Fall is proleptic of social community, so too, after the Fall, humankind’s broken relationship with God anticipates the brokenness of human community. Because our relationship with God is broken, so are our relationships with one another. Bonhoeffer’s theory of personhood also insists upon an orientation toward God,237 and acknowledges the eschatological reality of the primal state that affirms God’s act of reconciliation in the world. A day is coming when all things will be made new, our relationship with God, and our relationships with one another: community with God, and community with one another, will be restored.

Bonhoeffer’s dealing with issues such as primal state have direct implications of how we understand the very nature of sin, historicity, providence and eschatology. The world in which Bonhoeffer was formulating his ideas, was one where claims of divine providence and eschatology were being contested.

236 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 61.
That was the case not only in the academic arena of competing theological faculties such as Berlin and Bonn: it was also true of the public arena of an emerging National Socialist agenda.\textsuperscript{238} Even though he did not realize it at the time, Bonhoeffer was already beginning to equip himself with the theological resources he would later need to combat the Nazi threat. Hitler’s eschatology was one that heralded the Aryan race as destined to rule over all others. Bonhoeffer’s eschatology was one in which God’s love reconciled all peoples. The two could not co-exist with each other.

\textbf{3.1.2 The Community}

Bonhoeffer then moved from his focus on the primal state to investigate the nature of community itself. Community is God’s gift to humankind. It is in community that we experience God, one another and our true selves.\textsuperscript{239}

\begin{quote}
(H)uman spirit in its entirety is woven into sociality and rests on the basic-relation of I and You. Only in interaction with one another is the spirit of human beings ever revealed; this is the essence of spirit, to be oneself through being in the other.\textsuperscript{240}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{238} Bucher, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 55. “The function of the idea of providence is made clear in Hitler’s theological discourse: It serves as the central legitimizing category from the perspective of the theology of history for his own project. With the help of this idea, Hitler’s concrete political actions are inserted into a divine project, a divine road to salvation. Functionally, the idea of Providence is the most important category of Hitlerian theological discourse... Strictly speaking, just like all terms of Christian theology, the idea of Providence is conditioned in a particular way by ‘eschatology’: Only with and through God will its acts be recognizable in history. Until that time, though, the Christian faith is left with the hope that God stands by the history that he began with Creation and continued with Israel, Jesus and the Church. With Hitler this ‘eschatological’ caveat is missing completely. Hitler saw himself as an instrument of ‘Providence’, that is the ‘divine rule’ within the history of (truly free) humanity and ultimately he decidedly held the view that this ‘Providence’ has preordained his path.”

\textsuperscript{239} Bonhoeffer, \textit{SC, op. cit.}, p. 70. “There would ne no self-consciousness without community... self-consciousness arises concurrently with the consciousness of existing in community.”

\textsuperscript{240} Bonhoeffer, \textit{SC, op. cit.}, p. 73.
Bonhoeffer is careful to recognize that even though each person is open to the other in the sociality of community, there is also a ‘closed’ nature to personhood. For just as each person is open to be a receptor of ‘objective spirit’ – they are also bearers of it. To be a bearer of ‘objective spirit’ is to strengthen the sense of individual identity. Thus, the more one contributes and participates in community life, the more one becomes aware of one’s own individual identity.

The ideas of individuality and community, far from being mutually exclusive, are complementary of one another. They form a ‘fundamental synthesis’.241 Because of this synthesis Bonhoeffer insists we can speak of a ‘collective person’ in the same way we speak of an individual person.242 It is not that the individual is subordinate to the whole, or that the individual represents the whole – but rather that they have equal weight. Thus, community can be understood as a social and concrete unity.

Social unity is experienced as a centre of acts from which it operates; such unity is self-conscious and has a will of its own, though only in the form of its members... Its members must not be viewed as separate individuals, for the centre of activity lies not in each member, but in all of them together... It is not as if many persons, gathered together, now add up to a collective person. Rather, the person comes into being only when embedded in sociality, and the collective person comes into being together with the individual person.243

God created people to be in community with one another, and in community

241 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 74.
242 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 77.
243 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 78.
with God,\textsuperscript{244} since community does not just simply occur when people reside together, or have a sense of commonality. Community is formed as an act of the will – or more correctly, community subsists in acts of will.\textsuperscript{245} Yet communal acts of will differ from societal acts of will. Societal acts of will run parallel to one another towards a common goal; communal wills are reciprocal – that is, they will each other.\textsuperscript{246} Societal acts of will are aimed at a common purpose beyond the individuals concerned; community will is aimed at one another. In community, therefore, unity is not understood as agreement on a particular issue, but rather an agreed commitment to one another.\textsuperscript{247} Because we are made as individuals, not universals, conflict will arise in community, but this should be embraced, for ‘genuine life arises only in the conflict of wills’.\textsuperscript{248}

Bonhoeffer discerns three distinct forms of social relationship: community, society, and the mass. A community is where ‘life is lived’; a society is an ‘association of rational action’\textsuperscript{,249} and the mass results from ‘external provocation that aligns with the parallel wills of individuals’.\textsuperscript{250} In the mass, the individual is subsumed and no longer exists (this social relationship is very strong but unsustainable); in the society, the individual is subordinate to the common goal; in the community the individual comes alive.

When people come together in social relationship an objective spirit is
The objective spirit is understood to have a will that is separate to, and not identical to, the wills of the individuals in the social relationship. It is this objective spirit that is often conceived and experienced as community. In the case of the society being the predominant form of the social relationship, danger arises when the objectified spirit is seen as existing outside of time and thus is unmoved by the lived experience of the social relationship. Where community is the form of the social relationship, however, the objective spirit exists within time. It is seen as, “the connection point between historical and communal meaning, between the temporal and spatial intentions of a community.”

In a society, the objective spirit is a means to an end, a ‘device’ around which people gather. In a community, the objective spirit is a re-presentation of itself. A society may dissolve when the collective will, which constituted the society, dissipates. Once dissolved, the objective spirit of the society no longer exists, because it was only ever a means to an end; when the end is no longer in sight, the device used to get to the end no longer has any purpose. In a community, however, the objective spirit is the symbolic presentation of the community itself. If the community dissolves, the objective spirit may remain and, at a later date, may itself become an agent of drawing people to once more reciprocating their wills. For Bonhoeffer the society is time-bound and ‘can never exist beyond the idea of its constitutive purpose’, whereas the community is eschatological. Its reason for being is

251 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 98.
254 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 100.
a commitment to one-another that, although that commitment exists in time, is not bound by it. In other words, the commitment one to another found in community, does not have an end point in time. It is for this reason that Bonhoeffer believes that, “only a community, and never a society, can or should become ‘church’”.

Of course, the polemic arising between Bonhoeffer’s reasoning and the emerging propaganda of National Socialism is quite noticeable at this point. The National Socialist movement sought to include the church in its project of ‘reformation’ for the German people, but only on its own terms. Bonhoeffer does not see community as a place where the will of the individual bends to the will of the leader (or the masses); rather it is a status in which followers are formed by divine grace.

Bonhoeffer’s heavy suspicion of inwardness compels him to drop the theologically and metaphorically cumbersome task of explicating the grammar of the inner and outer spheres. In emphasizing the axiom ‘Christ existing as community’ as the principal agent of the call to outside, he also avoids reducing the event of God’s grace to the acoustic and individualistic call of proclamation. Bonhoeffer opposes any thinking in to spheres for the reason that it profanes the one reality interconnected through and mediated by Christ. He claims that the inner-outer distinction can produce theological convolutions which complicate what, in the final analysis, might be a situation so simple as: ‘Follow after’, nachfolge, be with others as the losing, giving and finding of yourself.

257 Herein we also find the seedbed for Bonhoeffer’s later writings in Life Together.
258 Bucher, op. cit., p. xv. “Hitler’s political project gains power by drawing on religious ideas and reinterpreting them in his own theological way. Central to Hitler’s project are the idea of community and providence as legitimization of his role as the chosen leader... All significant concepts of Hitler’s modern theory of the ‘state’ are secularized and bastardized ecclesiological concepts.”
3.1.3 The Broken Community

If the church is a community – it is also a broken community. Sin has entered the world through the Fall and has repercussions both individually and corporately. According to Bonhoeffer, the implications for community reside not only in the individual commitments that persons have for one another, but in the objective spirit that re-presents the community. In this way, the doctrine of original sin is best understood in terms of culpability rather than biology.\textsuperscript{260} As we have already defined persons as those who are ‘ethically responsible to one another’ (in contrast to a biological definition), then our definition of sin must also necessarily correlate to ethics rather than genetics. And, because we have already insisted that persons can only exist in relation to other persons, then, the

human being, by virtue of being an individual, is also the human race…. Thus humanity falls with each sin, and not one of us is in principle different from Adam; that is, everyone is also the ‘first sinner’\textsuperscript{261}.

Sin is thus universal and individual.\textsuperscript{262} Each person exists within a peccatorum communio (community of sinners).\textsuperscript{263} God addresses such communities and calls them to repent from sinfulness. Even though repentance can only occur within individuals, it is the corporate culpability that is being addressed. The sin of the community is the sin of the person, even if

\textsuperscript{261} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 115.
\textsuperscript{262} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 115.
\textsuperscript{263} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 118.
the person has not committed the sin, and in turn the community can repent even if not all the persons in the community repent.\textsuperscript{264} In the same way, the community can also know salvation.

This understanding of the person as a re-presentation of the community is what Bonhoeffer refers to as the ‘collective person’. The collective person of humanity realized in Adam, who corrupted the world with Sin, is superseded by the collective person of humanity realized in Christ, who has reconciled the world to God.\textsuperscript{265} The collective person of humanity realized in Christ exists in the world as the church-community: the Body of Christ.\textsuperscript{266}

### 3.1.4 Sanctorum Communio

Bonhoeffer believes that the church can be understood both historically and theologically. Any such analysis is fundamentally flawed, however, if the criteria applied is external to the church itself. Because the church is ‘grounded in the reality of God and God’s revelation’,\textsuperscript{267} the church can only be fully understood from within. In other words, because the church itself is a reality of revelation, its existence or validity can not be either proven or defeated by argument or evidence: it simply must be either believed or denied.\textsuperscript{268} For Bonhoeffer Christianity is the only religion in which the

\textsuperscript{264} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 120.
\textsuperscript{265} See also Romans 5:12-21.
\textsuperscript{266} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 121.
\textsuperscript{267} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 127.
\textsuperscript{268} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 127.
community of believers is integral to the very essence and nature of the religion itself.  

Bonhoeffer conducts a brief survey of the New Testament teaching on the nature of the church and considers the relation of Christ to the church in two ways: Christ as the founder of the church and, Christ as a ‘real presence’ in the church. For Bonhoeffer “the church is at once already completed and still in the process of growing.” The ‘real presence’ of Christ in the church is a challenging notion for theology to consider. It needs to be understood as both an eschatological and a historical reality. It is eschatological in the sense that it is the Body of Christ, perfect and pure; it is historical in the sense that it is a community of believers who gather together for worship and service. Bonhoeffer provocatively asserts that, “(t)he church is the presence of Christ in the same way that Christ is the presence of God.”

There is also a paradox here whereby, according to Lutheran theologian Chelsey Peterson, the church is simultaneously a ‘creature of the Word’ and a ‘Word event’ that is “being recreated and actualized continuously through proclamation of the gospel.” The grammar of ecclesiology is important here. Lutheran Reformation ecclesiology understands church more as a verb than a noun – activity rather than being. Christ’s presence constitutes the church and is evidenced, according to Peterson, through the gathered community.

269 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 131. See also Green, C., ‘Human Sociality and Christian Community’ pp. 113-133, in de Gruchy, Companion, op. cit., p. 113. Green suggests that a ‘theology of sociality’ is one of the major formative themes that contributes to the shape of his whole theology.

270 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 139.

271 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 139.

“The church is described in terms of the activities of hearing and gathering; the church is the assembly of those who have heard the promise through word and sacrament.”273

The paradox of Christ's presence in the Church is also seen in its redemptive action. The nature of sin is such that it creates utter isolation and brokenness for individuals: sin is what separates us from God and from one another. It also unites us to one another, because all of humanity shares both the experience and the effects of sin. The sin of one person (the collective person) is the sin of humanity, and the redemptive action of Christ, redeems all of creation. So too the isolation of Christ on the cross represents the isolation of humanity from God, and the guilt of those who crucify him is guilt shared by us all. Thus “the paradoxical reality of a community-of-the-cross... contains within itself the contradiction of simultaneously representing utmost solitude and closest community.”274

Bonhoeffer is careful to distinguish between the church as a religious community and the church as the revelation of God. The church originates with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – not upon individuals, as individuals – but upon the community of believers.275 It was not that Christ founded the church in an historical sense, for this was the role of the apostles as narrated in the book of Acts. Rather, Christ founded the church eschatologically, in that he proclaimed the reality of a new humanity.276 This paradox between the historical and the eschatological is also associated with the very nature of the Kingdom of God (translated in Sanctorum Communio as ‘Realm of God’).

273 Peterson, op. cit., p. 37.
274 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 151.
275 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 152. See also Marsh, op. cit., p. 73. For Bonhoeffer, the Holy Spirit does not reside in the world independently of the church. See also Kelly & Nelson, op. cit., pp. 56-58.
276 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 153. Bonhoeffer goes on to say that Jesus founded a religious community, the discipleship community, but they were not yet the church.
Although there is a correlation between the church and the Kingdom of God, they are not the same.

The Realm of God is a strictly eschatological concept, which from God’s point of view is present in the church at every moment, but which for us remains an object of hope, while the church is an actually present object of faith. The Church is identical with the realm of Christ, but the realm of Christ is the Realm of God that has been realized in history since the coming of Christ.\textsuperscript{277}

Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology is thus essentially Christological in nature. The church-community is the location of Christ’s vicarious action, in and for, the world.\textsuperscript{278} In the crucifixion Christ takes upon himself the sin of the world, and through Christ’s resurrection, God’s love triumphs over evil. The incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, then becomes the theological template for the life of the church. The church-community, as the Body of Christ, takes upon itself the suffering of the world and, in turn, gifts the world the possibility of new life.

In order for this theological template to take form in the life of the church, the work of the Holy Spirit is central and conditional. For Bonhoeffer the Holy Spirit works solely in the life of the church community and, by way of consequence, “community with God exists only in the church”\textsuperscript{279}. Individualistic concepts of faith are at this point null and void. “Faith is based on entry into the church-community, just as entry into the church-community is based on faith.”\textsuperscript{280} The sociological structure of the church-community is such

\textsuperscript{277} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 154.
\textsuperscript{278} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 155.
\textsuperscript{279} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 158.
\textsuperscript{280} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 159.
that it consists of three different modes of operation in the life of the spirit: the plurality of the spirit, the community of the spirit, and the unity of the spirit.281

By plurality of spirit Bonhoeffer refers to the individual faith of individual believers that leads them to a place of solitude before God.

This solitude, however, is not something done by faith, but is willed by God. It is the solitude of the individual that is a structure of the created order, and it continues to exist everywhere.282

This understanding of the solitude of each believer as an expression of God’s will is perhaps best understood in the doctrine of predestination. If such a teaching is viewed from the perspective of the individual, however, it corrupts our understanding of the profound nature of God’s activity. Predestination then is not so much about individuals becoming part of the elect, but about God coming to the Church.283 It is the individual person who becomes part of the church-community; it is God who gathers the church to God-self. So, when the Christ comes ‘into’ the life of a believer through the Holy Spirit, the church comes into the life of a believer.284

Bonhoeffer then addresses what he refers to as the ‘community of the spirit’, and he does so by examining the Christian concept of love.285 Bonhoeffer believes that while the “ethical command to love is not specifically Christian… the reality of love is nevertheless present only in Christ and in his church-community.”286 For Bonhoeffer the command to love is absolute and unconditional. Because of the absolute nature of this commandment, it is only

282 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 162.
283 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 164.
284 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 165.
possible through faith in Christ. Christians are called to love as an act of obedience to Christ, for Christ. When loving one’s neighbor, however, Christians are not called to love Christ ‘in’ the neighbor – but the neighbor as a person, as the ‘You’ in relation to the ‘I’. It is this love of the ‘You’ that allows the Christian ‘I’ to arise within the one who dares to love. The command to love has no limits within the Christian faith, and as an outworking of God’s will becomes an end in itself. But love of community does not form community, nor is it seen as a remedy to community. Instead this kind of love is in the end self-destructive. It is only love of the other (in Christ) that allows community to be formed. True community, then, forms around the Word of God found in Christ, which commands us to love as an act of self-surrender.

God wills community; and the human will, which surrenders completely, is in community, precisely because this surrender of ourselves is enabled only through God’s surrender.

Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 169. See also Marsh, op. cit., 1994, p. 143 “... from the perspective of the I in Christ, the other is to be accepted and cared for, not only because I see Christ in the other or because the other reflects and mirrors Christ – not even because I confess that Christ is one for the other. Rather, from the perspective of the I in Christ, the other is to be accepted and cared for because Christ’s love transforms the self in new and radically unanticipated expressions of compassion and mercy. This is agape love in its basic sense.” And Plant, op. cit., p. 67. “Christian love is possible only through faith in Christ. As a Christian, I love You my neighbour, not because benefits me or gives me pleasure, but because I experience in You God’s claim upon me. This does not mean that I love God in You, rather than loving You in yourself and for Your own sake; rather, only God’s Spirit enables me to overcome the ethical barrier between us in order that I can come to love You as you really are. My love for You is an expression of my intention to embrace God’s will and purposes for you, and to do so without limits. Where such love is realized, that is in God, can community truly come into being.”
Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 172.
Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 176. “Love finds community without seeking it, or precisely because it doesn’t seek it”.
Bonhoeffer also insists that the love of the community of Christ is not in any way abstract or theoretical. It is only made known through concrete acts of service. This love is primarily demonstrated in two ways: it is experienced through members of the community being-with-each-other, and members being-for-each-other. Being-with-each-other means that,

My burden is borne by the others, their strength is my strength, in my fear and trembling the faith of the church comes to my aid. And even when I come to die, I should be confident that not I, or at least not I alone, am dying, but that Christ and the community of saints are suffering and dying with me. We walk the path of suffering and death accompanied by the whole church.

Sharing in the hopes and fears, the joys and sufferings of one another is an essential consequence of being church together. It is not constitutive of the church in an ontological sense. The ontology of the Church rests firmly in Christ.

In the same way, being-for-each-other is best understood in terms of ecclesial practice. In this case there are three activities which witness to being-for-each-other (i) denying self for the sake of another, (ii) intercessory prayer, (iii) the mutual forgiveness of sins in God’s name. The emphasis here is on the ‘direction’ of intent. Being-for-each-other means putting one’s neighbour before oneself.

...love ultimately does not seek community, but wants to affirm the ‘other’ as such, and... the less it seeks, the more certainty it finds.

293 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 177. “God rules by serving; this is what the concept of the love of God entails”.
294 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 178.
296 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 182.
298 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 185.
Acts of service, intercessory prayer, the forgiveness of sins, these are not acts that we do as individuals. As members of the Body of Christ every act of service is an act of service in Christ’s name, every individual prayer is a prayer of the church, and every person forgiven is forgiven on behalf of the community. In this way the church is able to bear a burden much greater than the sum of the burdens of its individual members. Each person is able to serve with more humility, to pray with increased empathy, and to forgive sins far too great for any individual, because they do so in community with Christ.299

Bonhoeffer now addresses the third mode of operation within the sociological structure of the church: the unity of spirit. The unity of spirit in the life of the church is best recognized in the ‘collective person’ of the Christ-community, and is in many ways anonymous. It is not to be acknowledged where there is agreement or goodwill, but rather where there is disharmony and conflict.300

When Jew and Greek come together, it is not because of any recognizable mutuality, but only because of their unity in Christ.301 This unity in Christ exists with the contrast between individuals intact, or better still, magnified. Unity in Christ empowers each person to speak and act freely, without fear of causing division. For the objective unity of the community is not based on cognitive assent, or feelings of belonging, but because the people are one in Christ.302

299 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 190.
300 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 192. “When one person clashes with another, it might very well lead them to remember the One who is over them both, and in whom both of them are one.”
The unity of the Christian Church is not based on human unanimity of spirit, but on divine unity of Spirit, and the two are not identical from the outset.\textsuperscript{303}

Within the unity of the church there co-exists the eschatological paradox of the \textit{communio peccatorum} (the community of sinners) and the \textit{sanctorum communio} (the community of saints).\textsuperscript{304} These are not two different communities, but they are one and the same. These two communities do not refer to particular individuals, but to the ‘collective persons’ of Adam (\textit{communio peccatorum}) and Christ (\textit{sanctorum communio}). This eschatological community is also an historical community realized in the empirical form of the church. “The empirical church is the organized ‘institution’ of salvation.”\textsuperscript{305} The church is both imperfect and sinful, but it is also real and concrete, and not just an ideal representation of God’s future for humankind.\textsuperscript{306} Because the empirical church exists in history it has a ‘character’ that changes with time and context. Thus, there exists within the church the ‘objective spirit’ (the human spirit), which is ever-changing, imperfect and sinful, alongside the Holy Spirit which is perfect and eternal and pure.\textsuperscript{307}

The Christian Church gathers around the Word, which is manifest through both preaching and the sacraments.\textsuperscript{308} The Word both creates the community and unites the community, in both an eschatological and historical sense, for

\textsuperscript{303} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 198.
\textsuperscript{304} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 208.
\textsuperscript{305} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 208.
\textsuperscript{306} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 212.
\textsuperscript{307} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 215.
\textsuperscript{308} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 226. “The word constitutes the unity between essential and empirical church, between Holy Spirit and objective spirit.”
the Holy Spirit is at work when the word is preached. It is through the preaching of the Word that the will of God is actualized in the community.\textsuperscript{309} It is the gathered community that enables the Word to be the Word, even as the Word constitutes the gathered community as the church.\textsuperscript{310}

The Word itself is manifest in the life of the church in three distinct ways during gathered worship – preaching, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.\textsuperscript{311} These manifestations of the Word only make sense in terms of the ‘communal life’ of the church.\textsuperscript{312} Far from being a ‘voluntary association’ for people to attend in order to receive whatever benefits are available, Bonhoeffer insists that the church community is essentially about belonging.\textsuperscript{313} If the church was a ‘voluntary association’ then individuals would be free to listen only to the preaching they enjoyed, and infants who were baptized would bear no responsibility for the community, and the bread and wine of the Eucharist would seem nonsensical as the broken body and the spilt blood. By way of contrast, Bonhoeffer believes that the preached Word only exists inside the sanctorum communio in which it is rooted,\textsuperscript{314} infant Baptism comprises all those who potentially belong to the church (the infant is carried by the church as a mother carries her baby), and “the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper gathers all those who are serious about submitting their will to God’s rule in the Realm of Christ.”\textsuperscript{315}

\textsuperscript{309} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 227.  
\textsuperscript{310} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 232. “The Bible is the word only in the church-community, that is within the sanctorum communio.”  
\textsuperscript{311} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 238.  
\textsuperscript{312} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 241.  
\textsuperscript{313} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 227. Bonhoeffer believes that, “A Christian who stays away from the assembly is a contradiction in terms.”  
\textsuperscript{314} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 235.  
\textsuperscript{315} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 242.
Bonhoeffer seeks to differentiate between Roman Catholic and Protestant (specifically Lutheran) teaching on the issues of pastoral care\textsuperscript{316} and authority\textsuperscript{317} within the life of the church. For Bonhoeffer the priesthood of all believers and the category of ‘relative authority’ of the church (alongside the ‘absolute authority’ of the word) are essential points of departure. The traditional Lutheran understanding of what constitutes the ‘true church’ invested authority, not in institutional adherence or membership, but in vocational faithfulness. As Peterson explains,

“For Luther, the answer to the quest of the ‘true church’ was this: the church could and did exist wherever the word was being truly proclaimed and nourishing the faithful.”\textsuperscript{318}

Bonhoeffer attempts to maintain a quasi-sociological approach to his thesis, but it must be said that he struggles to do this. He maintains that the church is a ‘community of spirit as community of love’,\textsuperscript{319} in order to connect somehow with sociological categories that simply do not fit the very nature of the church that he has so methodically detailed. Bonhoeffer is also careful to distinguish between the ‘romantic experience’ of the church and the community of saints willed by God prior to any such human experience.\textsuperscript{320} The church community is not meant to be experienced but to be believed.\textsuperscript{321}

The reality of the church is understood not in moments of spiritual exaltation, but within the routine and pains of daily life, and within the context of ordinary worship. Everything else merely obscures the actual state of affairs.\textsuperscript{322}

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\textsuperscript{316} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 247-250.  \\
\textsuperscript{317} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 250-252.  \\
\textsuperscript{318} Peterson, op. cit., p. 38.  \\
\textsuperscript{319} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 266.  \\
\textsuperscript{320} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 278.  \\
\textsuperscript{321} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 279.  \\
\textsuperscript{322} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 281.
\end{flushright}
Bonhoeffer rightly asserts that in the end, "our age is not short on experiences, but on faith… (and) only faith creates a genuine experience of the church." 323

### 3.1.5 - The Eschaton

At the conclusion of his thesis Bonhoeffer rightly addresses the subject of eschatology. Bonhoeffer rejects the notion that history will find meaning through progress. 324 Instead, he believes history will find fulfillment when it ends. There is no such thing as a ‘pure church’ and within the empirical church there exists both good and evil – the sanctorum communio and the antichrist. 325 The end of time itself, the notion of ultimate fulfillment, brings with it the ideas of judgment and grace, both of which are central the Bible’s teaching. It is both the individual believer and the collective person of the church-community who will be judged, and both identities (individual and collective) will also share in the gift of God’s grace. 326 Bonhoeffer briefly alludes to the possibility of a Christocentric universalism (apocatastasis), whereby God’s grace is sufficient for all of creation. 327 For Bonhoeffer such an understanding is relegated to the status of hope rather than doctrine.

This understanding of salvation and the eschaton is very much at odds with the theology of Hitler and the National Socialist agenda. It is also at odds with

325 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 283.
327 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 287. “The strongest reason for accepting the idea of apocatastasis would seem to me that all Christians must be aware of having brought sin into the world, and thus aware of having the sins of humanity on their conscience. Justification and Sanctification are inconceivable for anyone if that individual believer cannot be assured that God will embrace not only them but all those for whose sins they are responsible.”
much of the Protestant Liberal Theology of the academy which sought to align itself with the way National Socialism seemed to embrace modernity’s reliance on scientific reasoning (albeit a rather selective approach), and the Roman Catholic Church’s endorsement of National Socialism’s rejection of modernity’s social upheaval.\textsuperscript{328}

Peterson also laments the selective hermeneutic the German Christians applied to traditional Lutheran teaching, and the resulting institutional acquiescence to Nazi hegemony.

\begin{quote}
(T)he ‘German Christians’ asserted German nationality alongside Holy Scripture as a source of revelation and truth, and by doing so, sought to establish ecclesiological authority based upon an adherence to natural theology and ‘orders of creation’ rather than obedience to God’s word.\textsuperscript{329}
\end{quote}

Alternatively, Bonhoeffer seeks to articulate a way of understanding church that is not captive to the arenas of secular politics, liberal theology, coercive hegemony, or institutional nostalgia. The followship imperative is one that is defined solely by the Lordship of Christ.

In the end, the church-community finds fulfillment as each individual ‘I’ seeks out and finds another ‘I’ (as opposed to a ‘You’). Here we find that love is completed.\textsuperscript{330} The eschaton is the end to which God’s love has been directing the church-community all along. No longer will the church walk by

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\textsuperscript{328} Bucher, \textit{op. cit.}, p. xvi. “Hitler promised the benefits of modernity (technological progress social equality, economic growth, betterment of social welfare and foremost unity) without the threats of modernity’s demand for pluralism and social disintegration.”
\textsuperscript{329} Peterson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{330} Bonhoeffer, \textit{SC}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 288.
\end{flushright}
faith, for the promises of God will be in plain sight. The age of the historical church will fade away, along with each tear that is wiped dry.\textsuperscript{331}

This is the hope of the church, our present church, the \textit{sanctorum communio}.\textsuperscript{332}

\section*{3.2 \textit{Act and Being}}

Bonhoeffer wrote his second academic thesis, \textit{Act and Being}, in the summer and winter semesters of 1929-30 while he held the position of ‘training assistant’ at the University of Berlin. Bonhoeffer's desire, contrary to the wishes of his supervisors, was to write a systematic investigation of the theology of consciousness, and, as he wrote later to a friend, to explore the, “problem of the child in theology.”\textsuperscript{333} This investigation also provided the philosophical foundation for his later development of the followship imperative.

\textit{Act and Being} is a vigorous exploration of theology’s understanding of epistemology, transcendence and revelation. His writing revisits some of the concerns first raised in \textit{Sanctorum Communio} in relation to the ontology of social meaning. It also prepares the way for his later reasoning in the unfinished manuscript of \textit{Ethics}. Bonhoeffer attempts to unveil the ‘closed circle’ of philosophical idealism and locate theological discourse within the ‘real’ world. Bonhoeffer is concerned that philosophical discourse ‘curves in upon itself’, because of the limitations of a fallen humanity, in a fallen world,

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\item \textsuperscript{331} Revelation 21:4.
\item \textsuperscript{332} Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 289.
\item \textsuperscript{333} Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 3. Reinhold Seeburgh, Bonhoeffer’s academic supervisor from the University of Berlin, had hoped that Bonhoeffer’s thesis would have an orientation towards Biblical Studies or socio-historical investigation. Bonhoeffer’s thesis is also largely indebted to insights he garner from Luther’s Lectures on Galatians.
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trying to understand itself. The only possibility of ‘breaking free’ from such a
dilemma is found with the notion of ‘revelation’: that which breaks into reality
from outside of our experience. In essence, this is how Bonhoeffer
understands the call to follow.

We can not follow Christ of our own accord. It is the Christ who breaks in to
our daily lives and calls us to join the grand narrative of God’s reconciling
Kingdom that enables our followship. *Act and Being* brings philosophical
clarity to this process of revelation and call. This clarity provides the basis for
Bonhoeffer’s writings on followship and his defiance of Hitler.

3.2.1 The Problem

Bonhoeffer first explores what he believes to be the ‘heart of the problem’ in
relation to theology’s ongoing dialogue with philosophy, and in particular,
Kantian Idealism.\(^{334}\) The danger of idealism is seen in the way that it
distinguishes ‘act’ from ‘being’ in a philosophical sense, without adequately
addressing the nature of divine revelation itself. Idealism has a tendency to
create neat philosophical categories that, in theory at least, are discrete and
mutually exclusive. The task of theology is to locate itself in a lived world
where faith exists in the intersection of cognitive speculation and lived
experience.

Act can never be ‘explained’ but only ‘understood’… just as

\(^{334}\) Bonhoeffer, *AB*, op. cit., p. 27. Bonhoeffer also sees Kantian Idealism as one of the
major stumbling blocks to a proper understanding of the community of the church in his
ecclesiological thesis *Sanctorum Communio*.
being can never be ‘proved’ but only ‘pointed out’.\textsuperscript{335}

The problem for philosophy originates with humankind’s quest for objective knowledge about itself. Thus, epistemology becomes a form of anthropology where the subject seeks to make itself the object in order to pursue knowledge about itself: in the end this process is self-defeating.

…(t)he question concerning being human is hidden in epistemology, whether or not we are dealing with transcendental attempts to interpret act or ontological attempts to interpret ‘being’ purely in its own terms.\textsuperscript{336}

Bonhoeffer, instead, locates the starting point of theological enquiry outside of the transcendental-ontological continuum. It is only through an understanding of the concept of revelation that theology can ‘escape’ the ‘closed circle’ of philosophical enquiry.\textsuperscript{337} Thus,

the concept of revelation must... yield an epistemology of its own. But inasmuch as an interpretation of revelation in terms of act or in terms of being yields 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.\textsuperscript{338}

Because theological epistemology finds its fertile soil in the church-community, it must also take into account the finitude of the fallen world in which the church exists. As such, act and being as theological concepts are

\textsuperscript{335} Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{336} Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 30.
\textsuperscript{337} It is with this in mind that Bonhoeffer makes his famous criticism of Barth’s theology having a ‘positivism of revelation’ in Letters and Papers From Prison published in Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 364, 373, 429, 431. Marsh, op. cit., p. 8. Marsh argues that in Act and Being, Bonhoeffer asserts that, “revelation cannot be reduced to either a transcendental or an ontological description, or to act and being, but is in reality prior to both.”
\textsuperscript{338} Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 31. Bonhoeffer continues his concern about the relationship between faith and the Church that began in Sanctorum Communio.
second order to the church’s understanding of sin and grace.339

3.2.2 Part A: The Problem of Act and Being Portrayed in Philosophy

Transcendentalism begins with the premise that ‘thought’ somehow tries to encompass that which is transcendent or beyond. Caught in between the polarized notions of ‘thought’, and that which is perceived as ‘transcendent’, is the Dasein (the conscious being). The self-realization of Dasein, the coming of reason itself, is the cause of crisis for reason because, in the end, human beings understand themselves not from beyond their own being (transcendence), but from within the limits of their own reason. In other words, as human beings, we define ourselves. The pursuit for objective knowledge or truth creates its own internal contradiction as a consequence.340

Dasein can never know itself, because it becomes its own reference point. The ‘I’ cannot be thought, because it is the precondition of its own thinking. And yet the ‘I’ cannot exist without the thought processes that create it in the first place. Thus transcendentalism is a self-perpetuating contradiction: the Dasein identifies itself as ‘a being’ (the knower), and yet according to its own internal logic, it is the performance of ‘an act’ (the knowing).341

The temptation that transcendentalism faces in this moment of paradox is to appoint the ‘I’ to the realm of sovereignty: the ‘I’ then becomes the ‘point of

339 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 32.
340 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 36.
341 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 38.
departure for all understanding’. But such a position also becomes a prison. The ‘I’ becomes an end unto itself, and separates itself from any genuine contact with ‘the other’. The ‘I’ becomes the creator of its own universe, but because of this, it has no external reference point with which to derive knowledge of itself. It is, “only when Dasein… is able to understand that it does not understand itself”, that we come to a point of receptivity to truth.

The importance for theology at this juncture is paramount. Bonhoeffer sees two options available for the church. The first is a radicalization of transcendentalism whereby, “the experience of God becomes the very experience of the self”. Within this paradigm, however, it is as if Dasein and God exchange places, and it is the Dasein who creates God via ‘an act’ of thinking. If God is simply my own creation, in my pursuit for the divine, I end up with myself. In this way Dasein creates God in its own image. And, just as the Dasein creates a prison for its own consciousness, so too, theologically speaking, transcendentalism is also in danger of imprisoning God within consciousness.

For Bonhoeffer, such theological assertions are intolerable. It is not because human beings are like God that God comes to them – on the contrary, God then would not need to come – but precisely because human beings are utterly unlike God and never know God from themselves.

The second theological approach available to the church is to declare that God is simply not objective, in the sense that, “God is no longer accessible even to

342 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 39.
343 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 41.
344 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 43.
345 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 52.
346 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 44.
347 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 53.
348 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 53.
the reflection of consciousness upon itself”. For Bonhoeffer this becomes the philosophical foundation for Barth’s Wholly Other.

As Bonhoeffer deliberates upon the very idea of God and the nature of revelation, the temptations of a totalitarian approach to theology are being emulated in the political arena by the rise of National Socialism. For surely it is a truism to assert that one of the dangers of totalitarian regimes is that they presume to speak with divine authority, however such divinity is named. For Bonhoeffer, however, it is only the call of Christ as revelation from God that can rightly demand our allegiance.

Bonhoeffer addresses ontological approaches to the problem of act and being through the contributions of its major thinkers in relation to theology, in particular Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Thomas Aquinas.

Husserl’s ontological method is based on phenomenology: it amounts to a systematic and objective study of what is assumed to be subjective, namely consciousness itself. The task of phenomenology is to eradicate what is perceived as reality, (since this perception is already an interpretation of the consciousness), and to uncover the essence of the thing. Such an endeavour presupposes the existence of an independent, ‘essential' being: the one who is investigating the ‘essence’ of things in the first place. Once more

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349 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 54.
350 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 55. See also Marsh, op. cit., p. 11. “If God cannot be an object of knowledge (Kant's claim), then God must be the knowing subject itself (Barth’s claim)... God is not known in the world, rather God’s knowing is the very creative origin of the world itself.”
351 Bucher, op. cit., p. 11, “The totalitarian political projects of the twentieth century can be understood as risk-taking versions of modernity's enlightened separation of religion and politics in as much as they reverse this separation; that is, they resacralize the political, only this time from the now independent sphere of the political.”
352 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 62.
we find the ‘I’ appointed sovereignty of itself.\(^{353}\)

Bonhoeffer then addresses changes in phenomenological thought culminating in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.\(^{354}\) Heidegger, according to Bonhoeffer, is mainly concerned with, “the analysis of what constitutes existence”.\(^{355}\) *Dasein* is understood as ‘being with others’ and ‘being in the world’, and in particular it locates its own ‘fallenness in a fallen world’. Rather than thought creating its own existence (as with transcendentalism), however, thought finds itself, as *Dasein*, in the world; in every instance, it is already in a world just as, in every instance, it is already itself. *Dasein* is already its possibility…\(^{356}\)

Therefore *Dasein* does not need to prove its own existence, because it already is. Being is always located in time, and *Dasein* is always located in the world, or better, “the world is contained in *Dasein*”.\(^{357}\) Heidegger’s philosophy is thus intrinsically finite and atheistic; no room has been left for the “concept of revelation”.\(^{358}\)

Bonhoeffer then proceeds to examine Catholic-Thomist philosophy and the way it opens up the concept of ‘being’ to allow for the transcendence of God. God is both beyond time and incorporates time. This relationship with time is best understood via the *analogia entis* (analogy of being).

God is not enclosed in *Dasein* nor *Dasein* in God, but just as God is imagined to exist in absolute originality, so human

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353 Bonhoeffer, *AB*, op. cit., p. 64.
355 Bonhoeffer, *AB*, op. cit., p. 68.
356 Bonhoeffer, *AB*, op. cit., p. 70.
357 Bonhoeffer, *AB*, op. cit., p. 72.
358 Bonhoeffer, *AB*, op. cit., p. 73. For an insightful assessment of the influence and relationship of Heidegger’s ‘Being and Time’ on Bonhoeffer’s ‘Act and Being’ see also Marsh, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-134.
beings are thought of as existing in their relative but authentic reality before God. The concept of likeness requires two substances that stand over against, yet in relative independence from, each other.\textsuperscript{359}

The Thomist \textit{analogia entis}, however, fails to insist that God is more than just a primary ‘is’. Because of the generality of the eternal ‘is’ promoted by Thomism, there always remains the possibility of arriving at a ‘being’ other than God.

The Christian idea of the ‘isness’ of God, however, is necessarily shaped by what it believes to be the very essence of God’s being: God is love; God is the holy one; God is the righteous one; God is judge etc. Christian theology must insist that God is not some sort of abstract philosophical ideal, and as such, the very nature of who God is cannot be separated from a doctrine of revelation.\textsuperscript{360} Thomist ontological theology fails because it is premised on the possibility of God experienced only within the limitations of human existence and, therefore, God’s presence is confined to the metaphysics of the closed, material world.\textsuperscript{361} Bonhoeffer concludes that there is no such thing as a ‘Christian Philosophy’ that does not acknowledge and accept the unique contribution of divine revelation in Christ.\textsuperscript{362}

\textbf{3.2.3 Part B: The Problem of Act and Being, and Revelation}

Transcendent approaches to philosophy deposit the location of truth ‘outside’
the person. In this way, truth is not an invention of the ‘I’, but is external to self. In a similar way, the nature of revelation is such that, “only those who have been placed into the truth can understand themselves in truth.”

Bonhoeffer insists that revelation is found entirely within the bounds of God’s freedom and will and, in this sense, it is both contingent and transcendent. God is only known to us as “pure act”. Because of this knowledge God cannot be conceived of, or reasoned, apart from God’s activity in the world. God is not only active in the world but also within human beings: we refer to this as faith. God comes to us but is never contained by us: God is truly transcendent.

The epistemological consequences of a transcendental philosophy means that the object of knowledge can never truly be known by itself. It can only be known in relation to the subject – that is, to the one knowing. In terms of revelation, however, God is always the subject. Revelation is always about God ‘knowing’ us – God ‘knows’ us into existence.

(The) cognition of revelation is called ‘believing’, what is revealed is called Christ, and the subject of understanding is

363 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 81. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 72, who compares Bonhoeffer’s methodology here to his thesis in Sanctorum Communio – that the church could only be understood from within.
364 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 82. See also p. 90, “God’s is free not from human beings but for them. Christ is the word of God’s freedom.” Although Bonhoeffer is very much indebted to Barth throughout his thesis, his approach differs here to Barth at this point because he is concerned of the danger of ‘formalizing’ the ‘occurrence of salvation’. See also Pangritz, A., Karl Barth and the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, William Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids Michigan, 2000, pp. 26-27. See also Marsh, op. cit., p. 14. Marsh writes that Bonhoeffer felt that Barth’s dialectical conception of God was inadequate. For Bonhoeffer, Barth’s great danger is that “God always remains subject and eludes every attempt to be conceptually grasped.” But Marsh insists that for Bonhoeffer, God must also “take shape in the concreteness of human community”.
365 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 83.
366 See also Plant, op. cit., p. 72. “Revelation is not something that the human mind abstracts from its investigations of the world: it is God’s gift. Bonhoeffer understood, therefore, what Barth intended by maintaining that God is not bound to anything, not even to the historical record of his revelation in the Bible.”
God as Holy Spirit. God is in revelation only in the act of understanding oneself. 

Because revelation is entirely an act of God, so too, faith is entirely an act of God. People can inspire one another toward religious activity, but only God can birth faith. In this way, faith and religion are essentially different. Faith is concerned with existential knowledge and religion is concerned with systematic knowledge. The knowledge of God that comes to us through revelation (God’s act) enables us to think of ourselves, and others, differently.

It is talking of God that first enables us to talk of ourselves. In a reflective theological form of thinking I have no more intimate reference to my existence than to God. On the contrary, one might say paradoxically that God is closer to me than my own existence, inasmuch as it is God who first discloses my existence to me.

Following on from this understanding of God’s self-disclosure, Bonhoeffer suggests that faith is not about a personal decision per se (especially if decision somehow implies power). Deciding for God is a consequence of God’s activity. It is only when we are in the truth that we know we are a sinner saved by grace: there is no decision here on our behalf. Falling into untruth, making a decision against God, is better understood as an act of God’s wrath against us – God is withholding grace.

There is of course an antithesis to the understanding of revelation as an ‘act’ of God. Thomas Aquinas’ insistence on ‘doing following being’ is primarily

367 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 92.
368 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 93. See also Wüstenberg, op. cit., p. 4.
369 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 95.
370 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 96. “Whether we know it or not, the human being is the question to God to which only God can provide the answer.”
based on the need to define revelation as ‘objective’ truth.\textsuperscript{371} Here, the emphasis is not on the epistemological relationship between the knower and the known, but rather on revelation itself being accessible, factual and objective. Within this approach, revelation can be understood in three ways: (i) as doctrine, (ii) as conscious experience, (iii) as an institution.\textsuperscript{372}

‘Revelation as doctrine’ is continuous and accessible and it can be either freely accepted or rejected.\textsuperscript{373} The danger here is that God is also confined by doctrine, and, the mystery of God is usurped. Such a concept of revelation does not adequately allow room for existential encounter with human beings. ‘Revelation as an experience of consciousness’, on the other hand, can only be understood as being subject to a quantifiable classification of human experience.\textsuperscript{374} Such a classification is obviously open to subjective distortion. The third option, ‘Revelation as an institution of God’, can be seen in both the ecclesial authority of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Biblical authority postulated by the Protestant faith, but there are obvious dangers here as well.\textsuperscript{375} Roman Catholic ecclesiology needs to be careful that it does not distance itself from encounters with persons of faith; Protestant churches need to be careful they do not fall into bibliolatry.\textsuperscript{376}

In the end, Bonhoeffer rejects all three possibilities of revelation because,

they understand the revealed God as something existing, whereas all existing things are transcended by act and being. Human beings take all that exists into their transcendental I, which means that what exists cannot be genuinely objective…

\textsuperscript{371} Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 103. \\
\textsuperscript{372} Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 103. \\
\textsuperscript{373} Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 103. \\
\textsuperscript{374} Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 104. \\
\textsuperscript{375} Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 104. \\
\textsuperscript{376} See Bonhoeffer’s earlier work Sanctorum Communio.
In other words, something that exists, something creaturely, is not able to encounter the existence of human beings, not even the ‘You’, the ‘claim of the neighbor’, unless God takes hold of human beings and turns them around.  

Bonhoeffer suggests that a genuine ontology (revelation as being) must satisfy two critical requirements: (i) it must affect human existence; (ii) ‘being’ must be in continuity. In this way ‘being in Christ’ is the same as ‘being in the church’. Bonhoeffer is not referring here to the church as institution; it is the church as the Sanctorum Communio, the church-community of persons who become the Body of Christ.

In rejecting the aforementioned categories of revelation, Bonhoeffer is also, albeit even inadvertently at this point, delineating himself from the cultish propaganda of National Socialism that saw itself as the primary vehicle of God’s providence for the German people. For the National Socialist project modeled itself in many ways upon the practices of the institutional church as it sought some form of ‘spiritual’ validity and justification for its all-encompassing ideology.

Hitler’s political project gains power by drawing on religious ideas and reinterpreting them in his own theological way. Central to Hitler’s project are the idea of community and providence as legitimization of his role as the chosen leader... All significant concepts of Hitler’s modern theory of the ‘state’ are secularized and bastardized ecclesiological concepts.

As we shall discover, as Bonhoeffer’s Christology develops, he sees revelation instead primarily as a call to follow, rather than an institution that seeks

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377 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 105.
378 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 108.
379 Bonhoeffer’s doctoral thesis.
380 Marsh, op. cit., p. 12, “Christ existing as community is the concretization of God’s knowing act in time and history.”
381 Bucher, op. cit., p. 49-57. “Providence: Hitler’s Theology of History.”
382 Bucher, op. cit., p. xv.
spiritual legitimacy.

3.2.4 Revelation and the Church

Here Bonhoeffer comes to the heart of his thesis. Bonhoeffer believes that existence *per se* can only truly be understood within the church-community, because the church-community provides the external reference point needed in order for *Dasein* to understand itself. Revelation, the word of truth that comes from outside of *Dasein*’s existence and provides this external reference point, is found in the “proclamation of Christ’s death and resurrection – within, on the part of, and for the community of faith.” For Bonhoeffer, the contingency of preaching enables God’s future, coming to the church to affect and determine the present, as revelation. Whereas the church as a system or institution, calls on the past, on reason, on what it knows in an attempt to find truth; the church as the community of faith ‘becomes’ the Body of Christ only as it stands before that which is outside of its own experience and knowledge. This act of ‘becoming’ always occurs in the present and, in this way, the church is the ‘present Christ’, ‘Christ existing as community’.

Bonhoeffer declares that, “Christ is the corporate person of the community of faith.” What he means by this claim is that, “God reveals the divine self in

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385 Bonhoeffer, *AB*, op. cit., p. 111. “The proclamation and the community of faith are linked in such a way that each, when considered on its own, loses its meaning altogether.”
Thus, the church itself, as the person of Christ in the world, is “God’s final revelation”.

The ‘church’ is, therefore, not a human community to which Christ then comes or not, nor is it a gathering of such persons as those who (as individuals) seek Christ or think they have Christ and now wish to cultivate this common ‘possession’. The church is rather the community of faith created by and founded upon Christ, in which Christ is revealed as the... new humanity itself.

For Bonhoeffer, then, the dialectic of act and being finds its resolution in the church. Christ is the one who ‘acts’ in the life of the church and brings meaning to its existence; and Christ is also the ‘being’ in and through the church finds its identity. The word and deed of Christ become the word and deed of the church, and also of the persons (as individuals), who make up the community of faith. In this way, each member of the community becomes as Christ to one another.

Within the church there is a continuity of revelation through preaching. Not every individual needs to be present for the church to ‘hear’ the word and, as such, for Christ to be present to the church through the Word. Thus, the

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387 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 112. For a full understanding of what Bonhoeffer means by ‘person’ see Sanctorum Communio. Bonhoeffer goes on to critique Barth’s approach (p. 126) for not adequately addressing ‘God as person’. “It is a fateful mistake on Barth’s part to have substituted for the concept of creator and lord that of the subject.” This results in an ‘ongoing reflection of dialectical theology on one’s own faith”, rather than an address to Christ. “God’s nonobjectivity is thereby sealed.” See also Pangritz, op. cit., p. 29.

388 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 112.

389 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 112.

390 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 112. See also Marsh, op. cit., p. 13, “The event of revelation does not coerce a distinction between God’s identity and God’s presence; Christ as community demonstrates the refiguration of both. What it means for God to be God is that Jesus Christ is the source of life together.”

391 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 113. For Bonhoeffer, human beings are never to be understood as individuals per se. Each person is part of a greater community – the community of Adam, or the community of Christ.

392 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 113.

393 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 113.
revelation of the preaching that comes to the church is external to the individual. Through the Person of Christ encountered in the church, the existence of human beings is both affected and transformed.394 Because each person within the church is also ‘in Christ’, each person becomes oriented ‘with Christ’ for the sake of others; each person’s identity is formed and shaped by the community itself. Revelation in and through the church is also both historically continuous and existentially present, both objective and subjective, and because of this, it is of course also neither of these things. This paradox occurs because the church is both a person (Christ) and a community.395

Bonhoeffer is also careful to include within his study the impact of the relationship between act and being on our understanding of what it means to be human beings. For just as the church is only fully understood in terms of the unity that exists between act and being, so too, we are to understand the human being as both individual person and corporate humanity.396 There is no hidden dichotomy here between sacred and profane, however, for we are no closer to the divine, corporately, than we are as individuals. Rather it is precisely in the everydayness of the Christian faith, experienced both individually and communally, that the grace of Christ is most present.397

Bonhoeffer writes that there are two basic ways of knowing that operate within

394 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 114. “Were the existence of human beings not affected through revelation in the community of faith, everything said there about the being of revelation in the community of faith would be pointless.”
396 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 120. See also Schliesser, op. cit., p.50. “For Bonhoeffer, the notion of the individual by itself is an inconceivable abstraction, for in their very existentiality human beings are woven into sociality.”
397 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 121.
the sociology of the church-community: existential knowing (believing) and ecclesial knowing (preaching and theology). A believing way of knowing describes the epistemological paradigm within which a person knows they are a sinner pardoned by grace. This is not a subjective event, but a knowing that happens in the community of faith as one stands before the collective person of Christ found in the church. Through this experience of existential knowing, “the external world appears in a different light”. There is now a “new sphere of knowledge” that opens up for the believer.

There are limits to this type of knowing. Because this knowing takes place ‘in Christ’, there needs to be a point of external reference to the word and deed of Christ. It is here that Bonhoeffer talks of ecclesial knowing – that is, preaching and theology. In preaching, Christ becomes the subject of the words spoken, not as the culmination of the faith of preacher but in the power of the faith of the church-community itself. By way of contrast, in theology, we find the memory of the church. In preaching and theological reflection, however, we find something different to mere oratory, or scholarly investigation. Within the life of the church-community, ecclesial knowing “turns revelation into something that exists”.

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398 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 126.
399 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 127.
400 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 129.
401 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 130.
402 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 131. See also Marsh, op. cit., 1994, p. 21. Marsh suggests that Bonhoeffer’s critique of Barth’s ‘positivism of revelation’ reveals a profound interest, “not only in the reality of the church but in both the worldliness of the world and the worldliness of revelation.” Bonhoeffer is concerned that, for Barth, the world is, “ultimately depleted of revelation”.

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3.2.5 Part C: The Problem of Act and Being and Humanity

Bonhoeffer restates that humankind can have no knowledge of itself apart from the revelation that comes from God, through Christ, to the church. God’s revelation is that we are sinners in need of grace. As human beings, our existence in the world is either ‘in Christ’ or ‘in Adam’. For Bonhoeffer act and being are synonymous with sin and guilt within the human condition located ‘in Adam’. Sin is human action; it is any action that is not ‘in Christ’. Such knowledge of sin only comes through revelation which is ‘in Christ’. So, intent is not needed for an act to be sin. Sin is the act that occurs within a particular state of being – that is, ‘in Adam’.

Thus, in Adam, act is constitutive of for being as being is for act; both act and being enter into judgment as guilty. The structure of Adam’s humanity should not be conceived in terms, theories or psychological-interpretation; no, I myself am Adam – am I and humanity in one. In me humanity fails. As I am Adam, so is every individual; but in all individuals the one person of humanity, Adam, is active.

The ‘state of being’ for those ‘in Adam’ is guilt. For Bonhoeffer, guilt is a process of self-awareness that is deprived of the knowledge and experience of grace that being ‘in Christ’ alone can provide. It is also a ‘false’ self-awareness, because we only see our true selves when we are ‘in Christ’. Guilt seeks out solitude, because our false self-awareness (conscience) fills us with fear and remorse, and a form of perpetual death, through which one

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403 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 136.
404 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 144.
405 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 145. “If sin were no more than a free act of a particular moment, a retreat to a sinless being would in principle be possible, revelation in Christ having become redundant.”
406 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 146.
407 Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 147.
must endure accusation and blame.\textsuperscript{408}

Humankind is set free from being in Adam, by the grace that comes to us by being ‘in Christ’. The salvation that comes to humanity is that the human subject no longer has to look to itself, captive to sin, but that, through grace, it can now find its true self ‘in Christ’.\textsuperscript{409} To find Christ means that one has already been found by Christ, for revelation comes to humankind from God alone. Bonhoeffer distinguishes the faith that comes ‘from Christ’ (and the faith in which Christ is known), with the knowing of Christ that comes through theological reflection.\textsuperscript{410} Because being in Christ means being oriented toward Christ in all things, this orientation necessarily creates difficulties when thinking of such a thing as the Christian conscience.\textsuperscript{411} To die to self must necessarily also mean to die to the conscience that seeks to remind the self of the old life ‘in Adam’. To be in Christ is to live in God’s future that God gifts to the present through Christ.\textsuperscript{412}

Bonhoeffer’s concluding remarks describe what it means to be defined by God’s future as the “eschatological possibility of the child”.\textsuperscript{413} The child alone lives in the present, because it sees the power and possibilities of the future, over and against the prison and guilt of the past. In this way, Baptism itself becomes the eschatological “call to the human being into childhood”.\textsuperscript{414}

\textsuperscript{408} Bonhoeffer, \textit{AB}, op. cit., p. 149.
\textsuperscript{409} Bonhoeffer, \textit{AB}, op. cit., p. 150.
\textsuperscript{410} Bonhoeffer, \textit{AB}, op. cit., p. 154.
\textsuperscript{411} Bonhoeffer, \textit{AB}, op. cit., p. 155.
\textsuperscript{413} Bonhoeffer, \textit{AB}, op. cit., p. 159.
\textsuperscript{414} Bonhoeffer, \textit{AB}, op. cit., p. 159.
3.3. Following On

Although Bonhoeffer's early academic writing is not as well known as some of his later contributions, theological seeds have begun to germinate. The influence of Barth's dialectical method, over and against the humanistic liberalism of Bonhoeffer's supervisors, is already quite evident, both in content and form. In his later years, Bonhoeffer will further extrapolate this method into a critique of Barth himself, when he famously suggests that his theological mentor is guilty of a 'positivism of revelation'.

Bonhoeffer's concern is that Barth's treatment of revelation is limited by the language of his ecclesiology and by virtue of this, his Christology. Concepts such as 'religionless Christianity', which will not appear for many years in Bonhoeffer's thinking, have their origins in the ecclesiology already taking shape in *Sanctorum Communio*. When Bonhoeffer insists that the "(t)he church is the presence of Christ in the same way that Christ is the presence of God", he is making a claim about the very nature of the Church that seeks to locate Christ in the world. Even at this early stage in his thinking Bonhoeffer is preparing the way for his later claims that the community of Christ is not bound by the location and language of the church. Instead, the *Sanctorum Communio* is found wherever Christ is found; and the language of revelation should not be bound by the language of the institutional church. Bonhoeffer is acknowledging what Wittgenstein refers to as 'language games' at play in conversations of faith and life.

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416 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 139.
417 Bonhoeffer of course never used the phrase 'language game' in any of his writings, and there is no evidence that he was ever aware of Wittgenstein's writings. But Bonhoeffer does understand the power of language, and the necessity for the church to be able to speak to the
Bonhoeffer's radicalized ecclesiology is as provocative in its assertions as it is ambiguous in its conclusions. In later years as Bonhoeffer seeks to confront the challenges of society's increasingly prioritized notion of individuality, and the failed ecclesial response to the evils of Hitler's National Socialism, he will seek to reconstruct his early ecclesiology, or at least reimagine a more orthopraxic understanding of community. The identity of the Church and the identity of Christ are revisited. Christ is identified primarily in terms of suffering, and the Church is identified as the place of witness to the suffering Christ.

In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer's still understands the presence of Christ in the Church taking up space in the world. But it is the space of the Church itself that is redefined.

This space of the church does not, therefore, exist just for itself, but its existence is already always something that reaches far beyond it. This is because it is not the space of a cult that would have to fight for its own existence in the world. Rather, the space of the church is the place where

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419 Bonhoeffer, *DBWE* Vol 6, op. cit., p. 343. "Instead, the relationship between church and world appears to us today as this new recognition of the origin that is awakened and bestowed through suffering, that is a flight to Christ resulting from persecution. It is not Christ who has to justify himself before the world by acknowledging the values of justice, truth, and freedom. Instead, it is these values that find themselves in need of justification, and their justification is Jesus Christ alone. It is not a "Christian culture" that still has to make the name of Jesus Christ acceptable to the world; instead, the crucified Christ has become the refuge, justification, protection, and claim for these higher values and their defenders who have been made to suffer. It is with the Christ, persecuted and suffering together with his church—community, that justice, truth, humanity, and freedom seek refuge. It is the Christ who is unable to find shelter in the world, the Christ of the manger and the cross who is cast out of the world, who is the shelter to whom one flees for protection; only thus is the full breadth of Christ's power revealed.”
witness is given to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ. The church is the place where it is proclaimed and taken seriously that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ, that God so loved the world that God gave his Son for it. The space of the church is not there in order to fight with the world for a piece of its territory, but precisely to testify to the world that it is still the world, namely, the world that is loved and reconciled by God.\textsuperscript{420}

Green insists that Bonhoeffer’s idea of Christ existing as community should never be understood as some sort of sectarian withdrawal from the world, but rather as a way of directly engaging with the world.

\textit{(T)}he same Christ who is present in the most personal way in the Christian community is also the universal Mediator of existence, history and nature.\textsuperscript{421}

In \textit{Act and Being}, Bonhoeffer takes his radical theology of revelation even further. Bonhoeffer lays the hermeneutical foundations of his realized Christology by providing an ontological rationale to the activity of God in the world. For Bonhoeffer, not only does God reveal Christ to the world, but in Christ we see what it means to be truly human. As we participate in God’s activity, as we find ourselves within the community of Christ, we become part of God’s revelation to the world.

So, whenever acts of love are embedded in community the incarnated Christ is revealed. Whenever people are persecuted for the sake of righteousness the crucified Christ is revealed. Whenever hope arises from the ashes of

\textsuperscript{420} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE} Vol 6, op. cit., p. 63.
despair the resurrected Christ is revealed. A hermeneutic of followship seeks to discover this witness to Christ already existing in the world, not as some form of natural theology, but as a form of radicalized Christology.

This discovery has implications for the way we respond to Christ’s presence. The followship imperative demands that whenever we encounter the Incarnate One embodying God’s love in community, that we too participate in this personification of grace and hospitality. The followship imperative demands that whenever we witness the Crucified One suffering injustice that we confront perpetrators with the non-violent and transformative love of God. The followship imperative demands that whenever the Resurrected One reveals a future once hidden by fear and doubt that the community of Christ rejoices in celebration and thanksgiving. It is only as we begin to embody the theology we espouse, that we truly learn to follow the way of Christ.

Such a radicalized ecclesiology also directly determines the primary location for faithful followship. Christ is not held captive by the church. As Marsh asserts, “Bonhoeffer... found the presence of Christ to be most palpable on the margins.”422 Here we discover the origins of Bonhoeffer’s later assertion of ‘Christological incognito’. But as we shall see, the followship imperative demands a public praxis. The confrontation of the cross and the swastika will be a determinative nexus in Bonhoeffer’s theography.

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Chapter Four:

The Public Praxis of Followship

The rise of Hitler and the Nazis in the first few years of the 1930s sharpened Bonhoeffer’s merging of theology and his understanding of the nature of discipleship. His theography would now make room for his first meeting with Karl Barth in July 1931. Barth’s dialectic methodology assists Bonhoeffer’s theological examination of followship when the political sphere is beginning to lay claims to totalitarian understandings of leadership, and the church – the Body of Christ – is running the risk of becoming complicit. For Bonhoeffer followship cannot lead to a pietistic removal from the social and the cultural. The transcendent nature and calling of the church must honour its primary loyalty and obedience to the one whose name it bears.

Bonhoeffer is now also acquiring a level of responsibility and acknowledged leadership within the church and the academy. He became a lecturer in the theological faculty in Berlin in August 1931 and was beginning to attract quite a following among the students on campus⁴²³. They found in Bonhoeffer a man of rare conviction and insight. Grounded in the philosophical traditions of Liberal Protestantism, and heavily influenced by Barth’s dialectic methodology, Bonhoeffer was beginning to find his own theological voice.

The themes he wrote about in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* infiltrate his lectures; they were developed further in the ways he began to engage with the wider church as it tried to situate itself within the emerging political context of Nazi Germany. Bonhoeffer delves into a somewhat hesitant, if not clandestine, political theology that germinates from his profound commitment to a realized Christology and a worldly ecclesiology. During this time, Bonhoeffer also experiences a type of conversion that influences the way he engages with the Biblical text, as not just a source text for theology, but as a witness to Christ.

It is at this point in his life that Bonhoeffer’s theography must negotiate the intersection of what David Tracy calls in *The Analogical Imagination*, the three publics of theology: church, academy and society. 424 For Tracy the social location and the intended audience of a theological discourse will be somewhat determinative of the theology itself. Tracy understands that theologians often migrate between these three publics; at times there will be overlap, and perhaps even conflict, between the differing ‘internalized selves’ of the theologians self-understanding. 425 Maintaining a sense of theological integrity and coherence across all three publics is essential for theology. His methodology in identifying and studying these three different contexts for theological discourse is pertinent to our understanding of Bonhoeffer’s engagement with the world, and his developing hermeneutic.

If, as Tracy suggests, the church, the academy, and the wider society, are

three different audiences that each require a different language and agenda for theological discourse, the young Bonhoeffer is learning how to operate with courage and faithfulness in all three. In 1928 Bonhoeffer spent a year as an assistant pastor in Barcelona and developed a profound love for the mundane realities of congregational life and the faith community of the church. From 1929-1933 Bonhoeffer studied and lectured in Berlin and New York, broadening his understanding of the place of theology in relation to the growing secularity of the world in which he lived. Here he was in the academy. And, as his theology developed, Bonhoeffer became more and more aware of the contest of ideas that was at stake as Word and world came into direct conflict. Bonhoeffer’s experience of theology in the academy was preparing him for a confrontation with the implicit but powerful theology of Hitler’s National Socialism.

The rise of National Socialism in Germany was referred to by Erich Voegelin as an emerging political religion. Bucher has subsequently shown that this religious quality was both intentional and pervasive.

(P)olitical religions embody doctrines of salvation that, like the classical religions, explain the whole of history. Unlike them, however, political religions imagine the ultimate aim of history as achievable within history itself. This achievability then justifies absolute violence, not as an eruption of raw passion, but as the cool execution of a recognized logic, as ‘cleansing’ and ‘liberation’. Political religions are hence not understood as a relapse into previous atrocities but as the expression of a new, immanent, but absolute faith.

427 Bucher, op. cit., p. 11. This quote is taken from Erich Voegelin’s 1938 study, Political Religions.
Bonhoeffer was early able to identify the theological threat of Hitler’s ideology. He was able to do this even while his contemporaries submitted to its appeals of nationalistic grandeur and providence, and its somewhat familiar ecclesial formula and language of faith. Hitler had a bold and public theological agenda. He sought to validate the all-encompassing nature of his reformation of the German people, articulated through the vocabulary and grammar of the institutional church.

The inspections of Hitler’s texts shows that Hitler’s discourse is continuously laced with theological terminology throughout all phases of his political biography. They are not simply rhetorical, they are central and constitutive… Theological elements are to be expected above all in three places in Hitlerian discourse: first, where Hitler deals with the Church, that is, where he defines his plan in opposition to the traditional carriers of theological responsibility; secondly, also where he deals with the genuinely religious traditions of his own movement, that is, the völkisch religiosity; thirdly, though, and centrally, those parts of the Hitlerian discourse are to be located, where he conceptualizes and legitimizes his own project through theological terms.

Bonhoeffer’s radicalized Christology, then, emerges within the public discourse of a newly proclaimed Führer, and this new leader’s call to follow, be obedient, and be educated into a particular way of being. Bonhoeffer’s dialectic theology is developed as a clandestine polemic against the pervasive monolithic hegemony of the Nazi propaganda machine. It serves as a telling exemplar of how followship must necessarily distance itself from political and cultural agenda and exercise at times almost a prophetic function. That role and responsibility is not simply one of a profession of social justice and

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428 Bucher, op. cit., p. 7-8. “Whereas the National Socialist attempt to ‘replace’ Christian rituals and practices (for example, the use of Christmas Carols that were solely nationalistic) was, by and large, unsuccessful, the inverse strategy of ‘incorporating’ religious traditions into the culture of the Third Reich proved both conducive to party strategy and propaganda, and popular among followers.”
advocacy for the disadvantaged and, in Hitler’s Nazi Germany, the damned and the scapegoated: it must also embrace a sense of repentance and a proper acknowledgement of the servant leadership of Christ and the transcendent claims of God upon the whole of life.

The two lecture series that we will examine are *Creation and Fall*, his only published lectures from this time, and *Christ the Centre*, a posthumous publication of a course on Christology, reconstructed from students’ notes.

### 4.1 *Creation and Fall*

Only the church, which knows of the end, knows also of the beginning.  

In the winter semester of 1932-33 at the University of Berlin, Bonhoeffer gave a series of lectures originally entitled *Creation and Sin*; they will be referred to herein by their published title, *Creation and Fall*. Bonhoeffer embarked on an innovative approach to the Scriptures that he referred to as ‘theological exposition’. With *Creation and Fall*, he was keen for the Bible to ‘assert itself’ in the lecture room. It was during this time that Bonhoeffer experienced a turning point in his own theological development and understanding of God.

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430 Bonhoeffer, *CF* op. cit., p. 22.
431 When his lectures were later published, Bonhoeffer had to change the title of his work to *Creation and Fall* because a previous work by Emmanuel Hirsch had already been published under the title ‘Creation and Sin’. *Bonhoeffer, CF* op. cit., p. 2.
Throughout his lectures on *Creation and Fall* Bonhoeffer attempts to "do theology in direct dialogue with the Bible". Bonhoeffer makes use of a similar theological/exegetical approach to that which Barth employed in his *Epistle to the Romans*. Bonhoeffer sought out a ‘post-critical’ examination of the Scriptures in a way which is designed to make the ancient text to ‘come alive’. The Christology, and ecclesiology, and ethics that are birthed in this lecture series will eventually come to maturity in Bonhoeffer’s later writings.

4.1.1 In the Beginning: Genesis 1

Now it may seem odd that a theology of followship would look back to Genesis 1. The reason for this is that disciples must come to understand God’s story, in order to be able to find their own place within it. Every story has a beginning. By studying God’s story of beginning, we also read our own. A theological reading of Genesis becomes a cipher through which to understand the very nature of our humanity, the brokenness of the world in which we live, and the power of God’s reconciling love. Bonhoeffer undertakes his theological exegesis on the first three chapters of Genesis as

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434 Bonhoeffer, *CF* op. cit., p. 8 See also Plant, *op. cit.*, p. 87. “Karl Barth’s commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans might have created controversy, but theologians all took Paul’s theology seriously. The Genesis myths on the other hand, outside the guild of Old Testament scholarship, were widely regarded as primitive legends with little relevance to modern life. Biblical scholars characterized their discipline as scientific; a critical and therefore objective commentary on the Biblical text. Few thought it part of their job to interpret the Bible theologically for contemporary ecclesial or even political life. Bonhoeffer tried not to dismiss scholarly insights altogether, but his concern was with the word of God for the Church, and for the witness of the Church for the world.”
435 For example, the ‘orders of preservation’ that Bonhoeffer outlines in *Creation and Fall* preempt the Divine mandates of *Ethics*. See also Plant, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-91, where Plant discusses the political theology at work in this lecture series.
an attempt to develop a rigorous theological anthropology to combat a rampant humanist modernism and the rise of National Socialism.\textsuperscript{436}

Bonhoeffer begins his theological exegesis by examining the ultimate question we ask in relation to the beginning: the question of why?\textsuperscript{437} For Bonhoeffer the question ‘why’ is humankind’s search for the beginning.\textsuperscript{438} The question ‘why’ pushes back upon itself in a limitless circle of inquiry because we ask what we can not answer. Each answer to the question of ‘why’ produces another ‘why’ and so on, until we draw closer to the beginning from which all questions come. We can never conceive of the beginning because it exists before time. And so, our questions circle in on themselves and have no beginning: in the beginning there is only God.

Genesis begins with the words “In the beginning, God created…” There is no question that can get behind this – because this is the beginning. It is not only the beginning in a temporal sense, but also in a qualitative sense in that it is an utterly unique event which cannot be repeated.\textsuperscript{439} In this way creation is an entirely free act. Bonhoeffer links the activity of God in creation with the activity of God in the resurrection of Christ.\textsuperscript{440} Just as God created the world out of nothing, as an entirely free act, so too, Christ is raised from the dead as

\textsuperscript{436} Bethge, op. cit., p. 148. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 89. Plant argues that Creation and Fall is also a political awakening for Bonhoeffer. In October 1934, Bonhoeffer gave an address at Richmond Methodist College based on his exegesis of Genesis 1-3. Plant suggests that his treatment of Genesis 1-3 and the Christocentric hermeneutic he applies, “pulls the rug of authority from beneath the feet of the Nazis and the German Christians.”

\textsuperscript{437} Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 25. “…the desire to ask after the beginning is the innermost passion of our thinking; it is what in the end imparts reality to every genuine question we ask.”

\textsuperscript{438} Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 26.

\textsuperscript{439} Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 32. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 82. “The beginning described in Genesis 1 is not to be thought of in temporal terms; but as something unique, a limit beyond which human beings cannot go.”

\textsuperscript{440} Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 35. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 82. “The character of this beginning, Bonhoeffer asserts, can only be known in the resurrection, which is, like God’s creation, a creating out of nothing.”
an act of God's freedom. 441 “… if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Bonhoeffer rejects any comparison of the Genesis creation narrative with other creation myths such as the Babylonian Enuma Elish. In the Genesis story, creation is not a by-product of God, and creation is not tied to God in any way. God is totally free from creation. The only thing that connects God with creation is God’s Word. 442 God is not ‘recognized’ in creation, as though there were elements of God in creation itself (Bonhoeffer rejects natural theology). It is instead God’s Word that acknowledges God as creator and we are called to believe this witness. 443 The word of God is the command of God; it is the act of God. There is no cause and effect, no word that precedes God’s work: “With God the imperative is the indicative.” 444

God sees what God has created and says that it is good. This claim does not mean that this creation is the best of all possible worlds, but rather that the world is under God’s Lordship. 445 What God has made, God continues to uphold. 446

The first day is completed and the new day begins. For Bonhoeffer this day is not limited to chronos: it is rather a day of “its own meaning, its own form, its

441 See also Plant, op. cit., p. 87. “Creation and Fall is... a turning point in its emphasis on human freedom in relation to the freedom of God. For Bonhoeffer, God gives human beings freedom to rule responsibly over creation. This means that human freedom is freedom 'for others'.” (Emphasis in original).
442 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 40.
443 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 41.
444 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 42.
445 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 45.
446 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 47. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 83, “…speaking of that involvement at creation risks implying that there was something imperfect in the original creation that God must tinker with until God gets it right. God does not continually wrest creation out of nothingness, but upholds and affirms creation itself, even though it is fallen.”
own power.”

The Biblical understanding of ‘the day’ at this point is measured in *kairos* and is concerned with the rhythm of life and the freedom from which God works. God speaks, works, creates in ‘the day’. In ‘the day’ creation awakes, in ‘the night’ it slumbers.

As the work of creation continues, Bonhoeffer rejects a literal interpretation of the text and examines instead the theological meaning of the narrative. God consigns the heavens and the earth to their place, as well as the stars and the seasons. These are the fixed realities of our existence. They are not determined by, or effected by humankind: they exist prior to the creation of life. On the third day, God creates the earth’s flora, on the fourth day, fauna – and life comes into existence. The unique distinction of life in creation is that life has the ability to recreate.

God looks upon all that is created and declares its goodness, but even this goodness lacks the freedom inherent in divinity. So God creates humankind as the one creature who embodies the freedom of God, the one creature that is made in God’s image. Bonhoeffer acknowledges Darwin’s theory of evolution and humankind’s association with the animal kingdom, but what he is most concerned about is highlighting our peculiar relationship with God.

Humankind is created free in order to worship the creator. Freedom in the Biblical sense is never something people have for themselves, but always something they have for others.

…freedom is not a quality that can be uncovered; it is not a possession, something to hand, an object; nor is it a form of

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448 Bonhoeffer, *CF* op. cit., p. 49.
something to hand; instead it is a relation and nothing else. To be more precise, freedom is a relation between two persons. Being free means ‘being-free-for-the-other’, because I am bound to the other. Only by being in relation to the other am I free.\(^{450}\)

This freedom of God as creator is best demonstrated by the freedom that God bestows upon humankind: we are free to worship. As image bearers of the divine, God’s freedom is incarnated in the way that we are oriented for others. Thus God enters creation itself as the very act of freedom God bestows. As image bearers of God, however, humankind is not invested with some sort of holy essence as such (\textit{analogia entis}) but rather it is our capacity to be for others, (\textit{analogia relationis}).\(^{451}\)

Bonhoeffer’s understanding of human identity at this point draws on his earlier work in \textit{Act and Being} and \textit{Sanctorum Communio}. Contrary to predominate individualistic interpretations of what it means to be image bearers of God, Bonhoeffer locates our identity in terms of relationship and sociality.\(^{452}\)

The freedom that comes with \textit{analogia relationis} means that we are free for one another and free for God: we are also free from the world. As image bearers of God we are called into a relationship or mutuality with our own likeness, and we are called into Lordship over creation.\(^{453}\) Bonhoeffer is quick to point out that our Lordship over creation also means that we are tied to creation: our freedom from creation means that creation is subject to humankind, but we are still in relationship with it. Because humankind has

\(^{450}\) Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF} op. cit., p. 63.
\(^{451}\) Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF} op. cit., p. 65. See also Plant, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 83. Analogia relationis, “is a likeness derived entirely from the one who is the prototype to whom the likeness points, and it is not a quality of human being independent from its source.”
\(^{453}\) Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF} op. cit., p. 66.
forgotten the story of our origin, however, it is the world that rules us. It is only as we live under the Lordship of God that we are able to provide the Lordship for the earth that God requires of us.

On the seventh day God rests. God rests not because of lethargy or exhaustion but rather because in God’s rest there is *shalom*. The day of God’s rest is the day of our rest in the same way that God’s goodness is our goodness and God’s freedom is our freedom. In the New Testament, this understanding of rest and fulfillment is found in the celebration and remembrance of resurrection. In God’s rest, in Christ’s resurrection, there is renewed hope for the days that are still to come.

### 4.1.2 Made in God’s Image: Genesis 2

In Genesis 2 God is referred to by the proper name *YHWH*. *YHWH*, the Creator God, forms humankind from the dust and breathes life into its nostrils. At first reading mythology of this type can seem child-like and perhaps even offensive to contemporary thinking. Yet the narrative asserts both the intimacy of creation, a loving creator whose very hands give form and shape to humankind’s existence and whose breath brings life into being – and, at the same time, the omnipotence of God, unequalled in power and supremacy.

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456 Bonhoeffer, *CF op. cit.*, p. 75. See also Plant, *op. cit.*, p. 83. “If the first creative narrative is for Bonhoeffer about humankind for God thought out from above; then the second is about God for humankind, thought out from below. The two narratives therefore compliment rather than contradict one another.”
457 Bonhoeffer, *CF op. cit.*, p. 76.
If God the Creator is to be called Father, then surely the earth is our Mother: the bond we all share with the earth is essential to our being.\textsuperscript{458}

The body is not a prison, the shell, the exterior, of a human being; instead a human being is a human body. A human being does not ‘have’ a body or ‘have’ a soul; instead a human being ‘is’ body and soul... just as Christ is wholly his body and the church is the body of Christ.\textsuperscript{459}

God is one with humankind in a way that differs with the relationship God has with the rest of creation. Because God breathes life into humankind, people are spirit beings who do not live apart from God’s spirit. Where the original body is destroyed through sin, God enters each person anew in Jesus Christ and, as Christ too is broken, through the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.\textsuperscript{460}
Humankind is thus redeemed in body and in spirit, because the body and the spirit are one.

Humankind is placed in the garden of Eden, not as a literal, geographical location – but as a narrative location – a place of \textit{shalom}. Within that garden there are two trees – that is, the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The narrative creates a picture of paradise that is outside of time, for this story takes place before our history, and yet it is our story that is being told. We are the ones who eat of the forbidden fruit; we are the ones who are expelled from the garden.\textsuperscript{461} Rather than trying to understand this story by searching for elusive historical facts beyond our reach, we need to experience this story as true because it speaks to the heart of the human condition. We must, therefore,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[458] Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 76.
\item[459] Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 76.
\item[460] Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 79.
\item[461] Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 82.
\end{footnotes}
seek to translate the old picture language of the magical world into the new picture language of the technical world. This must always be done, however, on the basis of the presupposition that, whether in the one language or the other, we are the ones intended to be addressed. 462

The tree of life is at the centre of the garden, just as God is at the centre of life. The centre of Adam’s world is not Adam but the tree of life. Adam has life, not because of his own doing, but because God’s gift of life is at the centre of Adam’s existence. Adam’s gift of life is also bound to the notion of obedience: Adam is not to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; if he does he will die. So, at the very heart of the human condition, even as we are created in the image of God and, as such, created as free creatures with the freedom of God (freedom from and freedom for), we are also created to obey. Here we find that the very limits of our human existence lie at the centre of our being. 463 The knowledge of good and evil is beyond Adam, who from the time he is created in God’s image lives his life in complete and unbroken obedience and blessing. It is not that Adam is unable to sin but rather that boundary of obedience has not yet been breached.

462 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 83. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 89. Plant suggests that Bonhoeffer uses Creation and Fall as a political critique of Hitler’s National Socialism. For Bonhoeffer there is a political Fall that has taken place. “In the earlier political era of Empire Bonhoeffer implies that office holders accepted the limits of their office as Adam accepted the limitation of God’s command not to eat of the tree of knowledge, while after the Fall of the Weimar constitution the Führer arrogated to himself the sicut deus of power without the boundary of the law. Bonhoeffer’s anxiety is that the Führer is becoming for the younger generation a verführer, the leader a misleader. The Führer is the serpent, tempting the young to make themselves like God.” (Emphasis in original).

463 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 76. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 84. “Adam understands the limit imposed by God’s word. It is not because he can distinguish between good and evil that Adam understands his limit. Rather, the prohibition to eat the fruit of the tree indicated on the one hand his freedom, and on the other the limit of his creatureliness. This boundary or limit to the human condition is not at the limit of his capacities, as if it marked the limits of human technology or ingenuity of capability; it is a limit at the centre of human life. The limit is God, and the limit is grace.”
The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the tree of death; it stands next to the tree of life in the centre of the garden. The terms good and evil (Hebrew: בְּרָעָה tob; and יָרָע ra) can also mean pleasure and suffering. These two words belong together. Humankind cannot know good without evil, cannot know pleasure without suffering. God has declared creation to be good, but humankind has no knowledge of goodness because what is good is what there is – as yet, there is no alternative. The one who eats of the forbidden fruit, at that moment, they will know good and evil, pain and suffering, life and death. There is evil in good: it is the experience of knowing that goodness will come to an end and that within the confines of human life, good eventually dies. There is also good in evil: it is knowing that evil will not prevail that, in the end, evil also dies. The great eternal truth of the knowledge of good and evil, of life and death is this: “Whoever grasps at life must die; ‘those who want to save their life will lose it.’”

Life thus is no longer viewed as a gift but rather as a commandment. In order to live life as a commandment, humankind draws upon its own resources: it tries to live with the good that comes from evil and the evil that comes from good. By doing so, “humankind lives in a circle; it lives out of its own resources; it is alone.”

God looks upon the creation of humankind and recognizes that Adam is alone and needs a partner. Eve, the created partner, is at the same time the

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464 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 89.
465 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 90.
466 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 89.
467 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 90.
468 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 91.
469 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 91.
“embodiment of Adam’s limit and the object of Adam’s love”.\textsuperscript{470} This limit, and this love, are God’s gift of grace to Adam. Bonhoeffer recognizes that sexuality, in both its distinctiveness and its attraction provides, “the ultimate possible realization of belonging to each other”.\textsuperscript{471}

4.1.3 The Fall: Genesis 3

God’s creation provides freedom for humankind to do both good and evil. In Genesis 3 we see sin come into the world. Bonhoeffer insists that to blame the devil for what happens in the garden is an utter distortion of the narrative. It is also too convenient to assume that the very nature of freedom means that evil is inevitable.\textsuperscript{472} The guilt of this event lies solely with humankind and yet the reasons for it are inexplicable. This is the ambiguity (the twilight) we must live with. The Bible does not seek to explain at this point the origin of evil; it sets out to witness to its character as evident in the guilt that humankind must bear as well as the traumatic and unending consequences of injustice and suffering that we now endure.\textsuperscript{473}

Evil comes into the world through creation itself. There is no mention of the devil in the narrative. There is no excuse that humankind can hide behind, there are no ‘greater forces’ at work here, just humankind in creation. Creation is not evil – it is good: and yet it is here that evil begins. Its origins lie with a question: ‘Did God really say you shall not eat from any tree in the

\textsuperscript{470} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{471} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 100.
\textsuperscript{472} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 104.
\textsuperscript{473} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 105. See also Schliesser, \textit{op. cit.}, p.56. Schliesser points out that we can see here the origins of Bonhoeffer’s notion of ‘vicarious representative action’ that he later expands in \textit{Nachfolge} and \textit{Ethics}. 
garden?” It is not that the question is evil itself but rather that the question, opens the eyes of the human being to a depth of which the human being has until now been unaware, a depth from which one would be in a position to establish or to dispute whether a word is God’s word or not.\footnote{474 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 106.}

Thus the entry point for evil in the world occurs when humankind begins to seek an “understanding of the essential nature of God”,\footnote{475 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 106. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 89. Plant suggests that Bonhoeffer’s dealing with the serpent in Creation and Fall is allegorical of his political concerns regarding Hitler. “The Führer is the serpent, tempting the young to make themselves like God.”} and when this ‘understanding’ takes precedence over obedience to the Word. It is not that humankind sets out to reject God’s Word, but rather that it chooses a path towards self-piety that eventually seeks to supplant it. Evil always hides itself in piety. In the same way our own quest for self-piety veils the godless questions of our own age: Did God really say to love your enemies? to return insult with blessing? to feed the hungry? to show hospitality to the stranger? To ask questions such as these places humankind in judgment over God’s Word, rather than being judged by it.

...where human beings use a principle, an idea of God, as a weapon to fight against the concrete word of God, there they are from the outset already in the right; at that point they have become God’s master, they have left the path of obedience, they have withdrawn from being addressed by God.\footnote{476 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 108.}

Adam does not set out to do evil. Humankind’s quest to be for God, as an act of our own piety, rather than as an act of obedience, is the seedbed from
which evil first springs to life.\textsuperscript{477}

Eve and the serpent continue their discussion and, as they do, they embark on the world’s first theological conversation.\textsuperscript{478} The conversation itself seeks to reach beyond God, in order to ask the question of ‘why?’ in relation to God. It suggests a previously unimagined possibility that God has been untruthful. This in turn becomes the most diabolical lie of all, and as Bonhoeffer calls it, “the ultimate possible rebellion, (whereby) the lie portrays the truth as a lie”.\textsuperscript{479}

Even here, the lie of the serpent is in reality another truth: and this too is God’s truth. The serpent declares that eating the forbidden fruit will make humankind like God. The serpent is right. But in doing so, it will also bring death. The dispute is not whether the serpent is right or not: evil comes into the world through disobedience.

When Adam and Eve eat the fruit they essentially stand in the place of God over and against themselves.

They themselves stand in the centre. This is disobedience in the semblance of obedience, the desire to rule in the semblance of service, the will to be the creator in the semblance of being the creature, being dead in the semblance of life.\textsuperscript{480}

There are three essential things that Bonhoeffer wants us to understand about the narrative of the Fall. The first is that the chain of events that lead to the

\textsuperscript{477} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{478} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{479} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{480} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 117.
Fall are not an excuse for what happened. There is no excuse. Any attempt at a rational explanation merely becomes an accusation against the creator. The second is that once sin has entered the world, it cannot be undone. Adam cannot absolve himself of his own guilt. Thirdly, Adam and Eve share their guilt together, not only in deed, but also in consequence. “Adam falls through Eve, and Eve through Adam.” Each one of us is implicated in the guilt of the other.

Because of sin the whole created order has been affected. Because we now live in a fallen world, the questions we ask of God are as fallen as the bearers of the questions themselves. As such, the question of evil is not a theological question,

for it presupposes that it is possible to go back behind the existence that is laid upon us as sinners. If we could answer the question why, then we would not be sinners. We could blame something else. So the question why can never be answered except by the statement ‘that’ which burdens humankind so completely. The theological question is not a question about the origin of evil but one about the actual overcoming of evil on the cross; it seeks the real forgiveness of guilt and the reconciliation of the fallen world.

Bonhoeffer declares that, “The end of God’s ways is bodily existence.” The narrative from Genesis does not say that by eating the fruit that human beings became aware of the knowledge of good and evil, instead it says that “the

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481 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 119.
482 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 120.
483 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 120.
484 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 121.
eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.”

Humankind’s existence now includes an awareness of shame, before God and before each other.

Before the Fall sexual intimacy was an expression of love and belonging. It was a celebration of the limit of the other in a sexual relationship as an act of grace being for-the-other. By wholly giving one-self to another the unity of the self is fulfilled in the other. After the Fall, the limit of the self becomes a mark of division, and each person is defined as over and against the other. The unity of the self is seen as threatened by the presence of the other, and the other is seen as someone to be conquered and controlled. Rather than seeing one’s identity as being-for-the-other, post-Fall humankind now seeks to see the other as being-for-the-self. The other is objectified for the reasons of self-gratification and preservation.

Humankind seeks to hide. Nakedness does not acknowledge itself because it sees the other first but, through the Fall, each person looks to themselves and, from fear or desire, tries to protect or conquer, rather than to give or serve. By covering their nakedness, humankind cover themselves, and bear witness to the divided lives they live.

Nakedness is the essence of unity, of not being torn apart, of being for the other, of respect of what is given, of acknowledging the rights of the other as my limit and as a creature. Nakedness is the essence of being oblivious of the possibility of robbing others of their rights. Nakedness is revelation; nakedness believes in grace. Nakedness does not know it is naked, just as the eye does not see itself

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485 Genesis 3:7.
486 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 122.
or know about itself. Nakedness is innocence.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 124.}

Thus humankind forwent the limitless freedom of God, the freedom to obey, instead to pursue the limitless freedom of being God-like, and with it became trapped within the limits of shame. Humankind’s response to the awareness of shame is to flee from God and hide.

This ludicrous and futile response to sin is evidenced by what Bonhoeffer refers to as conscience.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 128.} Conscience seeks to evade God’s judgment by judging itself and, in doing so, tries to convince itself that it is safe and good. The human conscience, however, is the ultimate deception. It chases humankind away from God under the guise of shame as replacement for justice. The conscience tells Adam to hide his nakedness from God – even as God calls Adam to stand exposed and confess his sin.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 129.} The conscience seeks to send Adam far from God for the very reasons – the reality of sin – that Adam needs to draw close. Adam’s response is to confess to his sin in a way that indict the woman – and yet in a more substantial way seeks to indict God: “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate.”\footnote{Genesis 3:12.} Rather than confess and submit to God’s grace that has called Adam to account, Adam seeks to veil his sin by accusing the Creator. It is his shame that increases, and his nakedness hides behind the self-defensiveness of his own conscience.

The fall of humanity brings both curse and promise from God. The curse is that humankind gets what it wants (the knowledge of good and evil); the
promise is that God will not abandon us. Thus, for humankind life becomes a battle with God and with one another. There are times of victory and times of woundedness. All the while we live between curse and promise.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 132.} Humankind is given the knowledge of good and evil and must live with the consequences this brings, and humankind is also given the promise of hope that comes to us from God’s word – even as it is realized in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Creator now becomes the Preserver – just as the created world now becomes the world preserved by God.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 139.} God makes ‘cloaks’ for Adam and Eve as a demonstration of God’s acceptance of humankind’s fallen nature. God’s ongoing participation in the fallen creation is one of imposing \textit{restraint and order}. Rather than removing or destroying humanity’s sexual desire, God provides garments for them to wear; rather than deserting or neglecting humanity in its fallenness, God provides a way for humanity to endure. For Bonhoeffer the fallen life is actually participation in death itself: Adam is dead before he dies.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, \textit{CF op. cit.}, p. 135.} Once humankind ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they became like God in a way that God had never intended, and as such, they died to the way they were first formed. But God preserves the gift of life for humankind by providing the gift of death. Death simply means an end to the fallen life we now live, and provides instead a new life in Christ for all who have died.

All orders of our fallen world are orders of preservation that uphold us and preserve us for Christ. They are not orders
of creation, but orders of preservation. They have no value in themselves; instead they find their end and their meaning only through Christ. God’s new action in humankind is to uphold and preserve humankind in its fallen world, in its fallen orders, for death – for the resurrection, for the new creation, for Christ. 494

The Genesis narrative now turns to the ‘tree of life’, 495 and Bonhoeffer suggests that this is what the story has been about all along.496 The tree of life is a reminder of all that is lost; the tree of life is reminder for humankind that it must die.497 Life is the very thing that humankind desires, and yet, because of its separation from God, life becomes instead what we endure.498 Life becomes a struggle against God, because life itself is a reminder of all that we do not have – that is life with God. And so, in humankind’s desire for life, we are seduced by a counterfeit – a life of our own making, a life where we are God. In our quest for life we become ensnared by death.499

Cain, the first born of humanity, is also the first murderer. Humankind has now taken upon itself, not only the role of creating life, but also destroying it. Human history begins when sin enters the world, and results in a child of humanity being murdered. This history is replicated again and again, as we continue to destroy life until death itself is defeated on the cross. The cross, then, becomes the tree of life for those who have left the garden. The power

494 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 140. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 87. Creation and Fall is a, “turning point in opening up a theology of nature. As a Lutheran, Bonhoeffer was concerned with the trend in Lutheran theology, to view the German nation as a divinely instituted ‘order of creation’. Bonhoeffer took from Luther a distinction between God’s creative act and God’s ongoing role in preserving or sustaining what God has created. On this basis Bonhoeffer coins the term ‘orders of preservation’. In his ethics he would return to this theme, recasting the ‘orders of preservation’ as the ‘divine mandates’.”
495 Genesis 3:22.
496 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 141.
497 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 142.
498 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 142. “Wanting to live, being unable to live, having to live – that is the way in which humankind…. is dead”.
499 Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit., p. 143.
of murder and death is undone through the murder of God’s son. 500

The importance of the place of *Creation and Fall* in the formulation of Bonhoeffer’s enduring theological contribution should not be underestimated. By utilizing a Barthian methodology of theological exegesis, Bonhoeffer was not only differentiating himself from the other lecturers of the theological faculty of the University of Berlin (including his former supervisors). He was also charting a way forward in terms of his own exegetical reading of the socio-political context in which he lived. 501 In this way, *Creation and Fall* was as much a socio-political critique of the Nazi Party and the German Christians as it was a theological rendering of the creation narratives of Genesis 1-3.

Bonhoeffer’s reading of Genesis is Christological in nature. For Bonhoeffer, Christ becomes the hermeneutical lens for the reading of every text. Drawing on his ontological studies in *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer can confidently identify and articulate a proleptic Christ at work in the Garden of Eden, already seeking to redeem humanity from its own destruction. It is not too much of a stretch then, to see the hope articulated in his lecture notes of the Christ who would redeem Germany.

There is also no doubt that Bonhoeffer’s later, more famous deliberations from *Finkenwalde* and *Tegel*, are informed from his exegetical work as a University lecturer. Bonhoeffer’s ethical framework, in relation to decision-making, individual and corporate responsibility, and ‘vicarious representative action’, even in its early development, displays an identification of ‘the self’ (as

501 Time Magazine published an article on Karl Barth May 31, 1963, where he recalled that he used to encourage young theologians, ‘to take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.’
understood in *Act and Being*) and the community (*Sanctorum Communio*) as being primarily ‘for others’. The consistency of Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic is both rigorous and challenging. The creation narrative subsumes Bonhoeffer’s own context, because the story of Christ reconciling the world is the narrative that all others must adhere to. It is not that Bonhoeffer seeks to find Christ somewhere in the story of Germany; he seeks to find the seeds of Germany’s redemption already within the story of Christ’s redemptive work in creation.502

Bonhoeffer’s treatment of the first three chapters of Genesis, then, is not merely a theological exegesis of Scripture; it is also a reading of his contemporary Germany. At the same time the German Christians were advocating a Marcionite rejection of the Old Testament, Bonhoeffer is reclaiming a Christocentric engagement with Jewish roots.503 This move is not for purely exegetical means. It has socio-political implications.

When Bonhoeffer rejects the widely held conservative Lutheran understanding of ‘orders of creation’ for a Christologically qualified concept of ‘orders of preservation’,504 he is also providing a polemic against such Nazi slogans as ‘Kinder, Küche, Kirche’ (Children, Kitchen, Church), or ‘Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer’ (one people, one nation, one leader) as some sort of

502 Compare to Hitler’s theology of providence outlined in Bucher, *op. cit.*, p. 56. “Providence is a long-established theological category. Essentially, within Christianity, it maintains that God holds a promise in store for this world that will not come to light only at the end of history in the ultimate confrontation with God at the ‘end of all times’, but that will come to light during history itself in the form of free response to the free agency of men. From a Christian perspective, Providence signifies God’s faithfulness to his promise of salvation throughout history. It records that God acts mysteriously for the whole world and in its history and towards its salvation... In Hitler’s interpretation the idea of Providence turns into an immediately effective legitimizing category for his own project. It is ‘Providence’ that proves Hitler’s path as rightful, for it is ‘Providence’ that bestows success and it is also ‘Providence’ that imposes trials. The concern here is not God’s history of salvation with humanity, but Hitler’s history of success and later, the explanation of his defeat.”


naturally created divine order. In other words, for Bonhoeffer, it is only through the reconciling work of Christ that we encounter God’s will and purpose in our lives. Bonhoeffer’s reading of Genesis is also a rejection of the National Socialist understanding of providence. History is not fulfilled by the prophetic arrival of the Third Reich; it finds its fulfillment in Christ. To embrace the followship imperative is to live within this proleptic fulfillment.

At this point in time Bonhoeffer’s theography reaches a climactic juncture whereby the teacher also becomes the disciple. His theology and his life begin to converge. Even as Hitler’s authority gathered momentum and sweeping changes were being made across the nation, impacting on people’s freedom and identity, Bonhoeffer articulates a theological position in his lecture room that demands more than a scholastic response from students. In *Creation and Fall* and *Christ the Centre*, Bonhoeffer’s assertions directly confront the hegemony of National Socialism and the German Christians.

### 4.2 Christ the Centre

Bonhoeffer’s Christology comes to us in a publication called *Christ the Centre*. This text is based on surviving notes taken by students in the lectures he delivered at the University of Berlin in the summer of 1933; it has been reconstructed by Bethge. The lecture series was originally designed to be in three parts: *Part One: the Present Christ – pro me; Part Two: the

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508 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Bonhoeffer, CC, *op. cit.*
Historical Christ; Part Three: the Eternal Christ. Part Three, however, is missing because the final installment of the lecture series was never given. It is likely that Bonhoeffer never actually finished writing this section.509

Bonhoeffer introduces the series with the provocative claim: “Teaching about Christ begins in silence.”510 Bonhoeffer asserts that,

To speak of Christ means to keep silent; to keep silent about Christ means to speak. When the Church speaks rightly out of a proper silence, the Christ is proclaimed.511

This silence might seem like a strange way to begin. What Bonhoeffer is critiquing is the assumption that our words can ever do justice to The Word (Logos). He is also positioning theology as subordinate to worship. In other words, it is the worshipping community, the church, that can rightly speak of Christ; and to do so it must begin in silence. He is also well aware that his current context is one full of misleading words and propaganda.

Christology is concerned with the Logos. It does not belong to the world or the church; it is the Logos of God. The witness that comes to us from God is that this Logos is not an idea but a person. One of the consequences of this contention is that Christology should not concern itself with the question of ‘How?’ The primary question is ‘Who?’512 Christ is not an object of human study, but our Lord who calls us to follow. It is important for Bonhoeffer to

509 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 117.
510 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 27. Bonhoeffer goes on to say, "The silence of the church is silence before the Word. In so far as the Church proclaims the Word, it falls down silently in truth before the inexpressible." See also Pangritz, op. cit., p. 104, for a discussion on Bonhoeffer's Christology in relation to the 'mystery' of God. There is also a sense that Bonhoeffer wants to be careful that theologians don't try to say too much about God in Christ for fear of seeking to supplant the primacy of revelation with our need for understanding.
511 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 27.
512 See also Pangritz, op. cit., p. 105, for further discussion about this. Theology needs to be careful of the ‘How?’ and should learn to develop a better sense of the mystery of God. In this way dogma is doxological in nature.
differentiate his Christology from the Protestant Liberal assertions of Enlightenment rationality, in particular the methodology of Hegelian Logic.\textsuperscript{513} The danger of a foundationalist epistemology that seeks somehow to philosophically prove the incarnation or existence of Christ is that it invites a theory of disproof. Faith is then replaced by belief in a philosophical theory.

The question of ‘Who?’ is not the question of reason: it is the question of faith.\textsuperscript{514} Bonhoeffer asserts that in our daily living we all too often ask questions of ‘How?’ because we are too terrified to ask questions of ‘Who?’ “Tell me how you are, tell me how you think, and I will tell you who you are.”\textsuperscript{515} By questioning ‘How?’ we seek to become the arbiter of our own knowledge because, in the end, we are the ones who ultimately wish to determine the ‘Who?’ The ‘Who?’ of Christ, however, is only determined by divine revelation and not theological reasoning. For Bonhoeffer, ‘Who?’ is the question of transcendence;\textsuperscript{516} it can only, “legitimately be put where the person questioned has previously revealed himself and has eradicated the immanent Logos.”\textsuperscript{517} This question is the transcendent question because how we understand Christ’s identity and our own are determined by our answer. If Christ is Lord then we are servants. If Christ is not Lord then we are lost.

Bonhoeffer understands the transcendent Christ to be present in the community of the church (The Body of Christ as outlined in Sanctorum Communio) and yet also in the personal relationships we have with one

\textsuperscript{513} In particular, Bonhoeffer refutes Hegel’s notion of synthesis. “This is the ultimate deceit and the ultimate power of this (human) logos.” Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 29. See also Marsh, op. cit., p. 120. Marsh discusses Heidegger’s influence on the way Bonhoeffer frames his Christology – especially in relation to the question of ‘who?’
\textsuperscript{514} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 30.
\textsuperscript{515} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 31.
\textsuperscript{516} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 30. (How? is the question of immanence)
\textsuperscript{517} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 32.
another, and in the centre of our social and political reality as a universal Mediator. In other words, the transcendent Christ is present in the Body of Christ, the church, even as it responds to the needs of the transcendent Christ who is present in the needs of the other.

Christology does not begin with our questioning of Christ; we are too impatient and cannot wait for the answer, and the answer is too terrifying for us to hear. “Pilate asks, “Who are you? And Jesus is silent.” Instead, Christology begins with Christ’s question to us, “Who are you?” This question can not be avoided; unlike the questions of the great philosophers of years past Christ still lives; his question still remains. The Christ who questions us is the Christ who seeks us out, who meets with us in our daily lives. Jesus questions the worker and the capitalist, the aristocrat and the communist, and the answers we give say more about ourselves than they do about God. When the worker says, “Jesus is a good man, he is saying more than the bourgeois says when he repeats, “Jesus is God.” The ‘Who?’ question that Christ persistently lays before us is part of what Douglas John Hall refers to as a continuing ‘interrogation’. In the end, when our word encounters the divine Word, one must die, for our word cannot co-exist with the divine Word. There are only two possibilities: who shall die – the Crucified One, or the disciple?

519 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 33.
520 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 34.
521 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 35. In Part Two of this thesis, Wittgenstein’s theories pertaining to language games will be explored as a way of unpacking some of Bonhoeffer’s thinking in this area.
Bonhoeffer is adamant that Christology is not soteriology.\textsuperscript{523} In other words the person of Christ is distinct from the work of Christ. And it is only as we discover who Christ is, that we encounter the true freedom of His grace: the person interprets the work. The point here for Bonhoeffer is that it is not the work of salvation that is the primary objective of Christology’s endeavours – rather, our goal is study of the person of Christ. We cannot do the work of Christ, even by following his example, but we can meet with Christ (the person). We are invited to join with Him in the reconciling of the world. In the end, of course,

\begin{quote}
(t)he separation of the question of Christology from that of Soteriology is necessary only to establish a theological method… The complete Christ is the historical Jesus, who can never in any way be separated from His work.\textsuperscript{524}
\end{quote}

The followship imperative has no greater goal than faithfulness to Christ. Followers are not called to right the injustices of the world, as though they could achieve anything in and of themselves, rather it is by following Christ that justice is realised and forgiveness proclaimed.

\section*{4.2.1 Part One: The Present Christ – \textit{Pro Me}}

In \textit{Part One} Bonhoeffer begins by asserting that there are two Christological statements that must premise our theological investigation: the first is “Jesus Christ is present as the Crucified and as the Risen One”; the second is:

\begin{quote}
\footnotesize
523 Bonhoeffer, CC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 37.
524 Bonhoeffer, CC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 39.
\end{quote}
“Christ, as person, is present in the Church.”

This ‘presence of Christ’ is more than His mere ‘effect’ in history or ‘influence’ in the life of the church. Christology is more than the study of cause and effect in history. Christology is also not interested in the personality of Christ (as with the search for the historical Jesus) – but rather the Person of Christ who is eternally present. To think of the personality and not the person is Christology without the resurrection.

Even as the Risen One, Jesus Christ remains the man Jesus in time and space. Because Jesus Christ is man, he is present in time and space; because Jesus Christ is God, he is eternally present.

Christ is made present to the world through the offense of proclamation. The offence here is not the actual presence of Christ (revelation) but rather the nature of Christ (humiliation). This proclamation is a stumbling block (skandalon) not as some sort of ‘second incarnation’ but as the ‘real Christ’. Bonhoeffer is careful here to distinguish between the incarnation (which he says is not an offence) and the humiliation of Christ (which he says is an offence). In other words, the proclamation of Christ enables Christ’s presence in the world insomuch as it is the proclamation of Christ’s humiliation – the gospel of the cross.

The question of ‘How?’ necessarily arises at this point. The answer can not be given by way of metaphysics but rather in terms of our relationship with Christ.

525 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 43.
526 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 44.
527 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 45.
528 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 46.
Christ is Christ, not just for himself, but in relation to me. His being Christ is his being for me, pro me. This being pro me is not to be understood as an effect emanating from him, nor as an accident; but it is to be understood as the essence, the being of the person himself. The core of the person himself is the pro me. That Christ is pro me is not an historical, nor an ontic statement, but an ontological one. Christ can never be thought of as being for himself, but only in relation to me. That in turn means that Christ can only be thought of existentially, or to put it another way, in the Church. Christ is not first a Christ for himself and then a Christ in the Church. He who alone is the Christ, is the One who is present in the Church pro me.529

In other words the being and activity of Christ are one and the same – Christ exists as part of Christ’s activity in the world, in and through the Church. And Christ’s activity in the world is pro me. Christ comes to us in three forms: as Word, as Sacrament, and as Church.

Bonhoeffer points out that Christ as Word is truth itself. It brings clarity and it comes in the form of an address, not simply an idea. The content of the address is not the unveiling of some sort of hidden truth but rather a call that demands an answer.

Address requires response and responsibility.530 It is not timeless but happens in history. It does not rest and is not accessible to anyone at any time. It happens only when the address is made... The character of truth in this addressing word is such that it seeks community, in order to face it with truth. Truth is not something in itself, which rests for itself, but something that happens between the two. Truth happens only in community.531

529 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 47.
530 See also Schliesser, op. cit.
531 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 50.
The church becomes the church as it listens to the Word that is already present in its midst.\textsuperscript{532} The truth that comes to the church through the Word is not ‘timeless truth’ but is always concrete and in the moment. The content of the addressing Word is always in the form of forgiveness and command. It does not matter so much whether the command is old or new but rather that it happens.\textsuperscript{533} The power of the command that Christ brings is this: Christ is not merely the bearer of the word but is the Word itself. Christ did not say, “this is the way the truth and the life” as the bearer of the word. Jesus said, “I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life” as the Word of God.\textsuperscript{534} In the same way Christ is not only present in the spoken Word of the Church (preaching) but also as the Word of the Church.

If the complete Christ is not in the preaching, then the Church is broken… Christ is present as the spoken word, not as music nor as art. Present as the spoken word of judgment and forgiveness.\textsuperscript{535}

Christ as Sacrament is to be distinguished from the Word and has a “specific justification for its existence”.\textsuperscript{536} It is not to be thought of as merely a symbolic action or some sort of holy mystery. Because of the promise of the forgiveness of sins the sacrament is concrete and clear in its revelation. The Word in the sacrament is not symbolic or representative because only something that is not present can be represented. The Word is present. It is through Jesus Christ that the sacrament is interpreted and made holy. In the

\textsuperscript{532} See also Peterson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 38. “For Luther, the answer to the quest of the ‘true church’ was this: the church could and did exist wherever the word was being truly proclaimed and nourishing the faithful.”
\textsuperscript{533} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CC, op. cit.}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{534} John 14:6.
\textsuperscript{535} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CC, op. cit.}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{536} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CC, op. cit.}, p. 52.
same way that the Word is not timeless, but is concrete in history, so too the sacrament is made present to the church in its worship. The presence of Christ in the sacrament is not present like a ‘bird in a nest’ but rather as a matter of revelation.537 The Reformers understood that Christ is everywhere (even in the rustling of the leaves!) but this does not mean that he is there for you, with intentionality, as He is in the sacrament. Again, the question before us should not be based on the metaphysical enquiry of ‘How?’ but rather the theological question of ‘Who?’. The One who is present in the sacrament is pro me. Christ is present in the sacrament in His humiliation. He is baptised in water in solidarity with our sinfulness, and His body is broken and His blood is shed in the form of the Eucharist.

As with the Word and the sacrament; Christ is also present in the church and as the Church.538 In other words, the community of Christ is also the presence of Christ that takes up space in the world.

The Church is the body of Christ, it does not signify the body of Christ. When applied to the Church, the concept of body is not only a concept of function, which refers only to the members of this body. It is a comprehensive and central concept of the mode of existence of the one who is present in his exultation and humiliation.539

After tackling the question of ‘Who?’ in his Christology, Bonhoeffer then addresses the question of ‘Where?’ For Bonhoeffer the question of ‘Where?’ is answered in relation to the question of ‘Who?’ The ‘Who?’ reveals the ‘Where?’. Because Christ is the One who is pro me (the ‘Who?’ question),

537 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 56.
538 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 58.
539 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 59.
this also reveals His location; being for an other necessarily denotes presence.

Where does Christ Stand? He stands pro me. He stands in my place, where I should stand and cannot. He stands on the boundary of my existence, beyond my existence, but still for me. That brings out clearly that I am separated from my ‘I’, which I should not be, by a boundary which I am unable to cross. The boundary lies between me and me, the old and the new ‘I’. It is in the encounter with this boundary that I shall be judged. At this place I cannot stand alone. At this place stands Christ between me and me, the old and the new existence. Thus Christ is at one and the same time my boundary and my rediscovered centre. He is the centre between ‘I’ and ‘I’ and between ‘I’ and God.\textsuperscript{540}

Thus, for Bonhoeffer, Christ is in the centre both spatially and temporally; He is so in three ways; that is in relation to human existence, in relation to history and in relation to nature.\textsuperscript{541}

To say that Christ is the centre of our human existence should not be understood as a psychological statement. It does not relate to our personality per se, our feelings or even our consciousness. It is a theological statement about being a person before God.\textsuperscript{542} Christ is able to stand in my stead, where I can not, under the judgment of God. This place of judgment, even though it is at the boundary of my existence, it is at the centre of Christ’s. So, in Christ, my boundary becomes my centre.

Christ is also the centre and boundary of history, not in some quantifiable and provable sense, for such a quest is nonsensical. Rather, Bonhoeffer asserts

\textsuperscript{540} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 60. (Emphasis in the original).
\textsuperscript{541} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 60.
\textsuperscript{542} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 61.
that, “History lives between promise and fulfillment”.\textsuperscript{543} And, as such, the fulfillment and meaning of history is the coming of the Messiah. It is the promise fulfilled. Just as humankind cannot fulfill the requirements of the law, so too, history cannot fulfill its own requirements because it is corrupted through sin. The fulfillment of God’s promise cannot be demonstrated only proclaimed. When we do so, Christ is at the same time both the destruction and the fulfillment of all the messianic expectations of history.

He is the destroyer in so far as the visible Messiah does not appear and the fulfillment takes place in secret. He is the fulfiller in so far as God really enters history and He who is expected is really there. The meaning of history is tied up with an event which takes place in the depth and hiddenness of a man who ended on the cross. The meaning of history is found in the humiliated Christ.\textsuperscript{544}

This boundary of history, the crucifixion of Christ, becomes the centre of history through the power of the resurrection. Because the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ is made present in the Word proclaimed through the church, so too the church is rightly understood as both the centre and boundary of history. The church does not make itself the centre in ways that are visible in the eyes of others; the centre of history here does not refer to prestige or power. Rather, the church is the centre of history precisely because it is perceived as being on the boundary, through its proclamation of the Crucified One, and its welcoming of the stranger.

Christ is also the centre between God and nature. Bonhoeffer maintains that Christ does not reconcile creation to God, for it has no guilt. Instead Christ

\textsuperscript{543} Bonhoeffer, CC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{544} Bonhoeffer, CC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 62.
redeems nature. This redemptive act is best seen in the sacraments where the elements of a fallen creation become part of the new creation through the proclamation of the Word. The elements themselves, part of nature, become the very Word of God.

4.2.2 Part Two: The Historical Christ

In Part Two of his Christology Bonhoeffer examines our approach to the historical Christ. He insists that there can be no isolation from the so-called historical Jesus and the Christ who is present to us now. The attempts of Liberal Theology to distinguish the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels from the Christ of Pauline Theology were always doomed to failure. In the end, Liberal Theology self-destructed because it could not find the historical Jesus. Instead, it found that Jesus could not be separated from Christ.

The very nature of historical investigation creates a polemic against its usage in relation to the historical Christ, for such research can never maintain an absolute negative or an absolute positive assertion. Because there we cannot rely on historical authority, we must instead turn to the witness of the Risen One to the Church, (ie to Himself), present in the community of believers and as handed down from generation to generation through Holy Scripture. It is the witness found in Holy Scripture that prevents the Church being hijacked by sentimentality; it is the scholarly scrutiny of the Church that

545 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 65.
546 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 69.
547 See in particular Schweitzer, op. cit.
548 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 70.
549 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 72.
prevents the misdirection of sectarianism. In the end, the historical Christ is encountered through the proclamation of the Word.\textsuperscript{550}

Bonhoeffer then distinguishes between what he calls a negative or critical Christology, and a positive Christology. A negative Christology does not concern itself with making the incomprehensible, evident; rather it should endeavour to determine what can not be said. A positive Christology, on the other hand, is firmly located in proclamation and the sacraments – what can and indeed must be said, and what is already present in the Word. In determining the limits of our comprehension and proclamation, we begin not only to formulate our confession of Christ, we also concern ourselves with the concept of heresy. By declaring what we believe to be true, we also reveal what we believe to be false. Bonhoeffer laments the loss of heresy in the contemporary church, because it very tellingly reveals our lack of confession.\textsuperscript{551} Seen from this perspective heresy is best understood as an outworking of love.

Bonhoeffer then outlines some of the various heresies the Church has faced and their ongoing presence with the Church throughout history.\textsuperscript{552} He does so as a prelude to determine what we can say about Christ, and with this he returns once more to the question of ‘Who?’\textsuperscript{553} He suggests that when we speak of doctrines such as the incarnation, strictly speaking, we should instead speak of the Incarnate One, lest we once more get side-tracked with

\textsuperscript{550} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 71.
\textsuperscript{551} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 75.
\textsuperscript{552} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., pp. 76-102.
\textsuperscript{553} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 102.
concerns of ‘How?’ rather than ‘Who?’ In other words, we do not hold to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth because of the doctrine of the Incarnation – rather, it is because of the Incarnate One that we seek to explain how God came to be one of us. Christ is present to us as the Word of God, the Incarnate One, and because of this we speak of the doctrine of the Incarnation.

This witness of Christ that comes to us as the Word of God is also evident to us when we examine the doctrines of the Crucifixion (Humiliation) and Resurrection (Exaltation) of Christ. Again, the question is not ‘How can this humiliated one be in union with God?’, but rather, ‘Who is this man that hangs on the cross?’ If our answer is that ‘this man is the Christ’, then His suffering becomes God’s suffering, and his words from the cross become God’s word present to us in our suffering, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” In this humiliation, God through Christ, enters the world of sin and death, not only on the cross as an event in history, but in every moment where the Word is present.

He goes incognito, as a beggar among beggars, as an outcast among outcasts, as despairing among the despairing, as dying among the dying. He also goes as sinner among sinners, (even as he is) sinless among sinners. And here lies the central problem of Christology.

How is it that the same Jesus who is sinless, becomes sin for our sakes on the cross and then overcomes sin through the power of the resurrection? Again the question is ‘How?’ The answer can only come to us in the form of ‘Who?’ Bonhoeffer asserts that because of the ‘Who?’ – that is, Jesus is

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554 Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 105.
Christ the Word – the paradox of Christology defeats itself. In other words, we cannot say that Jesus was sinless because of observations we may make of Jesus’ life in the gospel accounts; we can say that Jesus was sinless because of the claim the gospels make regarding His identity.\textsuperscript{557} Because Jesus is the Christ, he who knew no sin became sin for our sake.\textsuperscript{558}

In the same way, the glory of God revealed in the miracles of Christ is only evident to the community of believers. That is, those who have already asked the ‘Who?’ question.\textsuperscript{559} Ultimately we find ourselves at the empty tomb. It is not the empty tomb that is a witness to the resurrection (the ‘How?’ question again): it is instead the witness of the Resurrected One that points to the empty tomb. For, in the gospel accounts, it is only the disciples who followed Jesus the Crucified One who have their eyes opened to see Christ the Risen One. Or, as Bonhoeffer claims, “It is only blind faith that has sight here.”\textsuperscript{560}

For Bonhoeffer the Word is present to us as the Incarnated One, the Crucified One and the Resurrected One. As we have our eyes open to see the Incarnated One, and to hear the Word of truth that God speaks through our neighbours and our enemies, we also have our eyes open to see the suffering and injustice of the Crucified One and to hear the Word that comes to us through the cries of the broken, and through this we in turn have our eyes open to see the Resurrected One and the Word of hope that emanates from the very heart of God.

\textsuperscript{557} Bonhoeffer, CC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{558} 2 Corinthians 5:21.
\textsuperscript{559} Bonhoeffer, CC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{560} Bonhoeffer, CC, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 112.
The grammar of Bonhoeffer’s theology is important for us to consider. Bonhoeffer emphasizes Christology’s framework of enquiry as a mirror to Christ’s questioning. Because ‘Who?’ is Christ’s question it must be ours. It is the question that determines all other questions. It is also the question that gives meaning to the way we understand the ‘answers’ that the world seeks to give. When Hitler declares, “I am the Führer” he is giving an answer to a question that is necessarily subordinate to Christ’s questioning. We are called to answer the question of Christ’s identity, not Hitler’s.

Bonhoeffer’s Christology lectures are identified by Bethge as the high point of his academic career.\textsuperscript{561} In his Christology Bonhoeffer reclaims the Lordship of Christ as the central tenant of the Christian Church, over and against any and all, political or ecclesial, who would claim such titles for themselves. For Bonhoeffer, the equation is simple: Jesus is Lord, and therefore Hitler is not!

The identity of Christ can only be determined in terms of God’s self-revelation to humankind, and only because of the orientation of Christ toward humankind – an orientation that is for us. This is the centrepiece of Bonhoeffer’s Christology. For Bonhoeffer this is an ontological statement: “Christ is Christ not as Christ in himself, but in his relation to me”.\textsuperscript{562}

Christ can only be conceived of existentially, in the context of our own humanity. As such, it is the community that constitutes the existential reality of Christ. This existential reality is manifest through the preaching of The Word, the Holy Sacraments and the formation of community. The reality of

\textsuperscript{561} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p 219.
\textsuperscript{562} Bonhoeffer, \textit{CC, op. cit.}, p. 47.
Christ is not to be understood in terms of symbolic representation, however, but in terms of incarnational presence. For Bonhoeffer the demarcation between the sacred and the secular is in itself profane. It is in this regard that he talks of the need for a secular interpretation of Christianity, in order to divest religion of its preoccupation with God as the *deus ex machina*. The God of Christianity is a secular God, in the sense that God in Christ Jesus is for the world.

The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God, we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us.

This secular orientation within Bonhoeffer’s theology can only rightly be understood in terms of the followship imperative. It is through the praxis of followship – grace and obedience – that the gospel is to be primarily located in the secular world. Bonhoeffer will thus call for an exegetical methodology in relation to Christianity reading the world; which unveils the prevalence of the Word already present in the world.

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564 The term *deus ex machina* refers to an unexpected, artificial, or improbable character, device, or event that is introduced suddenly into a work of fiction or drama in order to resolve a situation of crisis or untangle a plot. This literary device was often utilized in Greek and Roman Drama whereby a god was lowered on to the stage via some form of prop-machinery.
566 Bonhoeffer, *LT*, op. cit., p. 7. Bonhoeffer quotes Luther “The Kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ.” See also Marsh, C., *Strange Glory: A life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Random House, New York, 2014. Kindle Location:4723. Marsh asserts that Bonhoeffer was ‘determined to promote engagement with the world’, even as the pseudo-monastic lifestyle of Finkenwalde had the effect of keeping the world at a distance.
567 Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., p. 84. Bonhoeffer identifies the problem of discipleship as a problem of exegesis.
Bonhoeffer will revisit his Christological hermeneutic in his later writings and
the tri-focal lens of the Incarnate, Crucified and Resurrected One will become
a centrepiece of his understanding of followship and ethics. It is at this point
that we return to David Tracy’s idea of the three publics for theology. For
Tracy the three publics demand three points of engagement: manifestation,
action, and proclamation. These three points of engagement in turn
correspond to the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.568 It is
because of the incarnation that followers of Christ are to engage the world as
Christ did, with hospitality and grace. It is because of the crucifixion that
followers of Christ are to manifest God’s forgiveness and non-violent love as a
response to injustice. It is because of the resurrection that followers of Christ
are to proclaim the good news of God’s reconciling love that has triumphed
over evil. As we shall discover in Part Two of our investigation of followship,
the language of faith is not always easily translatable between the different
publics identified by Tracy’s theological method. For Bonhoeffer, migrating
between the academy, the church, and the wider society, a common language
of followship anticipated what he will later refer to as his desire for a
’religionless Christianity’ in a ‘world come of age’.

The Incarnated One is the presence of God already with us in community,
manifested in love and peace and justice. Wherever there is grace at work
transforming the world, wherever learning takes place that seeks to reconcile,
wherever swords are turned into ploughshares and the way of violence is
abandoned for the sake of shalom, the Incarnated One is present. The
Incarnated One is constantly at work, always moving people toward the place

568 Tracy, op. cit., p. 405. “…manifestation, proclamation and action—vision, hearing and
act—moves forward into the particularity of its experience of the event of Jesus Christ.”
of confrontation with the powers, always striving for peace and healing, always anticipating the cross and resurrection.\textsuperscript{569}

The Crucified One is the humiliation of God for the sake of the world. Wherever there is persecution for those who seek justice, wherever there is the way of peace in opposition to the violence of this world, wherever truth dares to speak in the midst of falsehood, the Crucified One suffers in redeeming love.\textsuperscript{570}

The Resurrected One is the hope of God that arises in the midst of despair. Wherever there is new life emerging from the ashes of destruction, wherever there is the laughter of liberation that seeks to overturn tears of oppression, wherever there is a glimpse of a future hitherto unseen that seeks to transform the present with healing and peace, the Resurrected One boldly reclaims life as a gift from God.\textsuperscript{571}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[569] Tracy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 282. “Incarnation fulfills its liberating function only in intrinsic relationship to cross and resurrection. Cross and resurrection live together or not at all.”
\item[570] Tracy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 281. “The cross discloses the power, pain, seriousness and scandal of the negative: the conflict, destruction, contradiction, the suffering of love which is the actuality of life. The cross discloses God’s power as a love appearing as weakness to the powers of the world.”
\item[571] Tracy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 282. “The resurrection vindicates, confirms, and transforms that journey to and through its negations of the negations of a suffering love. The resurrection of Jesus by God grounds our hope in a real future for all the living and the dead where pain shall be no more. It discloses the enabling power of that reality as here even now.”
\end{footnotes}
Chapter Five:

The Cost of Followship

The constant entwining of Bonhoeffer’s theography with the socio-political context of 1930’s Germany produces a broad framework within which his portrait of followship is depicted. In 1935, on his return to Germany from England, he is invited to direct an underground seminary at Finkenwalde to help train ministers for the newly formed Confessing Church. If Germany provides the framework of Bonhoeffer’s portrait, then Finkenwalde is the canvas. His Christology and ecclesiology, pigmented by his work in the academy, provide the rich colours needed to portray the Body of Christ taking a stand against tyranny and oppression, and an acquiescent ecclesial institution that has lost its way. It is Bonhoeffer’s personal involvement in the Confessing Church’s struggle against Nazism that directs the brush-strokes. Bonhoeffer’s theology is always interconnected with the struggle of the church; the church’s struggle is always his own.

Bonhoeffer’s enduring contribution to the study of theology and followship may have originated in the academy, but it can only ever be fully understood ‘on the way’ with Christ in the praxis of following. His ontological studies began in Berlin regarding the very nature of our humanity and the essence of the church as the Body of Christ in the world today. He then developed a Christological hermeneutic for his university lecturing during the foundation years of the Bonhoeffer Circle, in order to present a somewhat theoretical introduction to his wider theological agenda. But these developments are by
no means indicative of his broader perspective. For Bonhoeffer theology did not belong in the academy; theology was conversation the church conducted in the world.

Bonhoeffer’s time at the *Finkenwalde* Theological Seminary was as much a formative time for Bonhoeffer as it was for his students.\(^{572}\) It was here that the followship imperative was realized and its cost encountered. At the same time Hitler’s National Socialist project was developing a salvific rhetoric that demanded its own allegiance.\(^{573}\) In every age the liberating power of the cross stands over and against the powers of violence and oppression, seeking to re-imagine and re-create the world. And so, as Bonhoeffer takes his stand against what he sees as the cheap grace of the German Christians, he makes his claim against all who would conform to the hegemony of power in every age. For Bonhoeffer the costly grace of Christ begins in the ordinariness of life, learning to discern and articulate the followship imperative in the midst of our encultured existence. He insists that the story of Christ must take precedence over the story of Hitler, or Protestant Liberalism, or German culture.

At *Finkenwalde* Bonhoeffer realized that the Christological hermeneutic he was developing had major implications for the way followers of Christ read their sacred text, and also for the way the Church attempts to read the world.

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572 Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., p. 21. “(*Nachfolge*) is not a departure, or detour, in Bonhoeffer’s thinking – but an integral step in the development and maturing of his theology.”

573 Bucher, *op. cit.*, p. 112. Bucher talks about the dangers of militarism as a ‘politics of salvation’. “At the core of these politics lies a project of purification, of ‘cleansing’, of liberation – however not always from my own sins or my own mortality, but from the others as an the imposition that they represent. This God promises an ‘eliminatory salvation’, salvation at the cost of the existence of others. This is salvation from the ills of this world by eliminating everything and everybody allegedly responsible for my suffering. This ‘salvation’ certainly has one great advantage: it can be politically produced, or so at least it promises.”
Bonhoeffer had also begun to understand the extent to which the Bible itself reads the community of Christ. Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic of the Incarnated One, the Crucified One and the Resurrected One thus becomes a hermeneutic through which the community of Christ is formed and followship enacted.

5.1 Nachfolge

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that within (Nachfolge) one can discover a reiteration, in some form, of almost everything Bonhoeffer had previously written. Nor was it an overstatement on Bonhoeffer’s part when, in his prison letters, he could say that, despite all later misgivings, he still stood by what he had written on discipleship in Christ.574

Nachfolge is the book-title from which the term ‘followship’ derives its name. It is a pivotal text for the praxis of followship. Of all Bonhoeffer’s writings, it is perhaps the most accessible and the most widely read. Nachfolge seeks to ‘incarnate’ the teachings of Jesus from Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount for Bonhoeffer’s own context. In doing so, he provides somewhat of an insight as to how the same teachings may be incarnated for every context. It is for this reason that Rudd asks in his Monthly essay, ‘What would Bonhoeffer do?’575 But of course, answers to questions such as this are not always so easily discerned; the followship implications for 1930’s Germany may not necessarily apply in every situation. In our close reading of Nachfolge, however, we will discover a universal hermeneutic that can be applied to every context, and this is what we will use in our contemporary reading of

574 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 17.
Bonhoeffer finished preparing the manuscript for *Nachfolge* in the August of 1937; it was published later that same year. The book is primarily based upon a number of earlier lectures and courses Bonhoeffer had delivered to seminary students at *Finkenwalde*, and theology students from the University of Berlin.\(^{576}\) As stated in the preface, the concern of Bonhoeffer’s thesis is essentially Christocentric: “What does Jesus want from the church today?” Bonhoeffer provocatively asserts,

> ... if Jesus himself and Jesus alone with his word were among us in our preaching, then quite a different set of people would hear the word and quite a different set of people would again turn from it. \(^{577}\)

Bonhoeffer insists that, if the church is faithful to the call of followship to Christ, then it would look very different to the way it does. But, as it is in the gospel narratives, those who swear allegiance, are all too often found wanting. Even though it may be true that the road of followship is difficult and narrow, Bonhoeffer reminds us that whatever Christ asks of us, he also gives us the grace to achieve. For Bonhoeffer followship is joy.\(^{578}\)

### 5.1.1 Part One: The Call to Followship

Bonhoeffer begins his seminal piece with the provocative claim, “Cheap grace

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\(^{577}\) Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., p. 35. See also Plant, op. cit., pp. 93-94. Plant compares Bonhoeffer’s theology of discipleship with Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio’s painting of the ‘Calling of Saint Matthew’ where the Jesus of the gospels is depicted calling a seventeenth century Matthew’. The effect in both Caravaggios’s painting and Bonhoeffer’s treatment of Christian discipleship is that the call of Christ is always a call in the present.

\(^{578}\) Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., p. 39. Bonhoeffer juxtaposes the difficulties faced by the call to follow Christ with assurances of Jesus that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.
is the mortal enemy of the church. Our struggle today is for costly grace."\(^{579}\)

Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is Baptism without the discipline of community; it is the Lord’s Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ.

Costly grace is the hidden treasure in the field, for the sake of which people go and sell with joy everything they have. It is the pearl, for whose price the merchant sells all that he has; it is Christ’s sovereignty, for the sake of which you tear out an eye if it causes you to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ which causes a disciple to leave his nets and follow him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which has to be asked for, the door at which one has to knock.

It is costly, because it calls us to discipleship; it is grace, because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs people their lives; it is grace because it thereby makes them live. It is costly because it condemns sin; it is grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, grace is costly, because it was costly to God, because it costs God the life of God’s Son – ‘you were bought with a price’ – because nothing can be cheap to us which is costly to God. Above all, it is grace because the life of God’s Son was not too costly for God to give in order to make us live. God did, indeed, give him up for us. Costly grace is the incarnation of God.\(^{580}\)

For Bonhoeffer cheap grace arose in the life of the church as the church became more and more secularized, and the world became more and more Christianized. In time, grace became a liturgical presupposition, and discipleship became institutionalized within the monastic movement. Bonhoeffer laments the way that monasticism has been relativized within the Christian church. The devotion and discipline required for monastic living became an alternative example for the few who were specifically called rather

\(^{579}\) Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 43.
\(^{580}\) Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 44.
than being seen as a model for genuine followship. Bonhoeffer recalls Martin Luther’s commitment to the monastic life and subsequent return to the secular world, not as an affirmation of the world, but as a frontal assault to live as Christ in the world, and not apart from it.

What had been practiced in the special, easier circumstances of monastic life as a special accomplishment now had become what was necessary and commanded for every Christian in the world. Complete obedience to Jesus’ commandments had to be carried out in the daily world of work. This deepened the conflict between the life of Christians and the life of the world in an unforeseeable way. The Christian had closed in on the world. It was hand-to-hand combat.

Luther’s proclamation of grace alone is only understood when mediated with his insistence upon the call to followship. For Luther justification by grace was the only answer for a life dedicated to service and sacrifice; his followers turned this conclusion into a principled presupposition. The slogan of the reformers left out the need for followship. Bonhoeffer would have none of this.

Only those who in following Christ leave everything they have can stand and say they are justified solely by grace. The recognize the call to discipleship itself as grace and grace as that call. But those who want to use this grace to excuse themselves from discipleship are deceiving themselves.

581 Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., p. 47. “The humble work of discipleship had become in monasticism the meritorious work of the holy ones.”
584 Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., p. 51 Bonhoeffer recalls Kierkegaard, “When Faust says at the end of his life of seeking knowledge, ‘I see we can know nothing,’ then that is a conclusion, a result. It is something entirely different than when a student repeats this statement in the first semester to justify his laziness. Used as a conclusion this sentence is true; as a presupposition it is self-deception.”
For Bonhoeffer followship simply begins with the call to follow. In the synoptic gospels the narrative call of the first disciples appears most unreasonable. There is a danger that the reader feels somehow deprived of prior knowledge not introduced into the story. When Jesus calls Simon and Andrew, James and John, and Levi the tax collector, their response is immediate, unconditional, and unqualified. Why? Have they met him before? Are there extenuating circumstances of which we are unaware? Bonhoeffer insists that we have all the information we need. Their response is so comprehensive because of the identity of the one who calls them. Jesus does not call as a teacher, or as a role model, but as the Christ – the Son of God.

For Bonhoeffer the one who responds is inconsequential to the One who calls. These stories are not told to draw our attention to the response of the disciples that we might marvel at their obedience; rather, they demand our attention be given to the one who calls them by name.

…there is no other path to faith that obedience to Jesus’ call.

Followship offers no content, no programme, no agenda, other than Jesus Christ.

Discipleship is commitment to Christ. Because Christ exists, he must be followed. An idea about Christ, a doctrinal system, a general religious recognition of grace or forgiveness of sins does not require discipleship. In truth, it even excludes discipleship; it is inimical to it. One enters into a relationship with an idea by way of knowledge, enthusiasm, perhaps even

585 See also Marsh, op. cit., p. 107. With Bonhoeffer, “An ‘abstract Christology’, a Christology which is oriented in a system of doctrine or a general religious knowledge, is placed in contrast to a discipleship bound to Christ. Knowledge of Christ does not just incite a certain course of behaviour or an admirable example of the life best lived. Knowing Christ is following Christ – it is obedience.” (Emphasis in original).
586 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 57.
587 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 58.
by carrying it out, but never by personal obedient discipleship. Christianity without the living Jesus Christ remains necessarily a Christianity without discipleship; and a Christianity without discipleship is always a Christianity without Jesus Christ. It is an idea, a myth.\footnote{588 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 59.}

Bonhoeffer writes that belief is something we learn on the way with Jesus.\footnote{589 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 62.}

Our response to Christ’s call is not based on faith, or belief, or courage, or reasonableness, because these explanations are centered in the person who is called. Belief and courage and faith and obedience are only possible because Christ is the one who calls. It is with this in mind that Bonhoeffer makes the circular assertion: “only the believer obeys, and only the obedient believe.”\footnote{590 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 63.} Bonhoeffer is careful not to assume any sort of precedence or pre-condition. He is not saying that faith arises from obedience, or that obedience comes from faith: “Faith is only faith in deeds of obedience.”\footnote{591 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 64.}

Faith and obedience are both consequences and prerequisites of one another. Bonhoeffer is very aware of the circular logic here, but is adamant that followship and grace are learned on the way with Christ, not worked out through a process of theological rationalization. The unbeliever is called to obey and, along the way, discovers faith: the believer is called to obey as an outworking of the faith that already exists. It is not that works create or require faith; rather a situation is given in which faith can arise.\footnote{592 “Peter cannot convert himself, but he can leave his nets.”\footnote{593 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 64.} On December 5, 1943, Bonhoeffer writes in a letter to Bethge: “We live in the sphere of the penultimate, and have faith in the ultimate, do we not? Lutherans (so-called) and Pietists would get goose bumps even thinking such a thought. But it is the truth nevertheless. In Nachfolge (in the first chapter) I have only hinted at this idea, but subsequently didn’t develop it. Now this must wait for a later time.” This hint that Bonhoeffer refers to is the idea that even though we seek the ultimate, we must take our
an act in and of itself which necessarily leads to salvation, but it does provide an occasion for salvation to occur.

Bonhoeffer calls the church to recover the notion of ‘simple obedience’.\(^{594}\) He warns us of the danger of trying to find the true meaning behind Jesus’ words, which we can do in an effort to avoid the stark and sobering difficulties we often face in seeking fidelity with scriptural demands. It is only in acts of concrete obedience to Christ that faith is free to arise.\(^{595}\) Obedience to Christ, however, also necessarily involves suffering, because the call to follow inevitably leads to the cross.\(^{596}\) Furthermore, following Christ is also synonymous with self-denial,

\[\text{… knowing only Christ, no longer knowing oneself. It means no longer seeing oneself, only him who is going ahead, no longer seeing the way which is too difficult for us. Self denial says only: he is going ahead; hold fast to him.}\]

Self-denial for Bonhoeffer is not just a convenient slogan of self-piety. Self-denial is always about the cross; obedience is always about the cross; grace is always about the cross.

Those who enter into discipleship enter into Jesus’ death.

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594 Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., pp. 77-83. See also Plant, *op. cit.*, p. 100 “To be sure it is right for Christians to read the Bible with discernment and to have what Bonhoeffer calls (after Kierkegaard) a ‘paradoxical understanding of the commandment’; but it is ‘necessary always to include a literal understanding of Jesus’ commandment in every paradoxical interpretation’. This means that at the heart of our justifiably sophisticated ways of reading Jesus’ words, Christians must not lose sight of the possibility that Jesus speaks to us to command simple obedience within the pages of the Bible. Such obedience, Bonhoeffer reiterates, is costly, as it will mean not only suffering with Christ but also more painfully sharing his rejection.”


596 Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., p. 85 “Just as Christ is only Christ as one who suffers and is rejected, so a disciple is a disciple only in suffering and being rejected, thereby participating in the crucifixion. Discipleship as allegiance to the person of Jesus Christ places the follower under the law of Christ, that is, under the cross.”

They turn their living into dying; such has been the case from the very beginning. The cross is not the terrible end of a pious, happy life. Instead it stands at the beginning of community with Jesus Christ. Whenever Christ calls us, his call leads us to death. Whether we, like the first disciples, must leave house and vocation to follow him, or whether, with Luther, we leave the monastery for a secular vocation, in both cases the same death awaits us, namely, death in Jesus Christ, the death of our old self caused by the call of Jesus.598

By taking upon themselves the path of the cross Christians are called into a daily, life-and-death struggle with sin. We are called to bear the guilt and brokenness of one another. This is the ‘burden of the cross’. It is a burden of sin that demands a specific response from all who follow the way of Christ, for the weight of the cross also includes the burden of forgiveness. Forgiveness then is not some sort of optional extra for the pious or particularly devoted. It is an intrinsic and essential component of fellowship: it is required of all Christians.599

Suffering and fellowship go hand in hand because, “(d)iscipleship is bound to the suffering of Christ.”600 Christian suffering is not in anyway disconcerting. It is a seedbed of grace and joy. Disciples rejoice in their suffering because they share the burden of their suffering with the Christ who suffers with, and for them. Suffering is overcome by suffering.601 Because Christ bore the weight of the cross, we are called to bear the weight of our own discipleship.602

Bonhoeffer insists that Christ calls disciples to be individuals and respond as

598 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 87.
599 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 88.
600 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 89.
601 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 90. “The cup of suffering will pass from Jesus, but only by his drinking it.”
602 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 91. “Bearing constitutes being a Christian.”
people ‘alone’ before God. Christ stands as the eternal mediator. He is present between the disciple and God, the disciple and other people, and the disciple and the world. The Christian disciple thus lives in a world where immediacy is an illusion. Every relationship is mediated through Christ, “There is no way from us to others than the path through Christ, his word, and our following him.” Community then, is only possible in Christ. The Christ who demands my allegiance and, as such, separates me from any allegiances to, and responsibilities for, others, also unites me to others through himself. The only true path to others is through Christ the mediator.

Everyone enters discipleship alone, but no one remains alone in discipleship.

5.1.2 The Sermon on the Mount: The Extraordinariness of the Christian Life

Bonhoeffer’s commitment to followship brought him into direct conflict with the hegemony of Hitler’s National Socialism. The story of Jesus and the Kingdom of God stood in opposition to the story of Hitler and the Third Reich. In order to give clarity to this opposition, Bonhoeffer's exposition on followship looks to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s gospel. Bonhoeffer is developing a polemic against Hitler’s carefully constructed ‘sermons’ that

603 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 92. “Christ intends to make the human being lonely. As individuals they should see nothing except him who called them.”
604 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 93.
605 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 94.
606 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 95.
607 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 98.
609 Mathew 5-7.
were the centerpiece of the Nuremberg rallies. The liturgical nature of these gatherings, with aesthetics such as ‘the cathedral of lights’, helped to create a theological legitimacy for the National Socialist agenda. Bonhoeffer meticulously articulates his reading of the Beatitudes in opposition to the propaganda of Hitler’s project: Jesus is Lord; Hitler is not.

Jesus calls the disciples ‘blessed’ not because of anything they have done themselves. They have been called by Christ and God’s promise is available to them. The call and promise that once belonged to the children of Israel now belong to the followers of Christ and all who have ears to listen.

The poor in spirit are those who have forsaken all for the sake of Christ. Their only hope is Jesus and in his kingdom. These are the blessed ones who have discovered that the true treasure of the kingdom is found in the complete poverty of the cross. Those who mourn are the ones who cannot conform to what the world refers to as happiness and peace: as the world rejoices in its own self-aggrandizement, they stand apart in sorrow. They mourn because they love; and, in love, they bear the suffering of the world. The meek are the ones who renounce all rights of their own for the sake of Jesus

611 The cathedral of lights was one of the main aesthetic features of the Nuremberg rallies. It consisted of 130 searchlights aimed skyward at 12 metre intervals around the perimeter of the gathered assembly in order to give the impression of a ‘wall of light’.
612 Bucher, op. cit., p. 64. “In Hitler’s thought the notion of God as ‘Authority of the Whole’ is ranked even higher than the category of the ‘the German people’. It is the transcendent instantiation of appellation and it guarantees the certainty of his own racist concept. It functions as the cognitive leap out of that particularity which Hitler’s racist ideology otherwise constructs. Thus Hitler manages to define himself to himself not as a sheer power politician concerned with a German interest in world domination, but as the executor of a divine will who is reinstating the injured divine and hence ‘natural’ order of the peoples.”
614 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 103.
615 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 104.
Contrary to the way of the world that seeks to patronize the meek with the placatory promise of a place in heaven, Jesus declares they will inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness have renounced their own righteousness. They will always be hungry and thirsty on the way with Jesus.\textsuperscript{617} The promise of blessing from Jesus, that they will be filled, is found at the cross, where God’s righteousness is realized for all the world. The merciful will receive mercy as they give up their own dignity for the sake of others.\textsuperscript{618} The merciful are those who seek out the lost and the broken and bestow healing with abundant and undeserving love, and in doing so they lose their own sense of honour. They take upon themselves the shame of others.\textsuperscript{619} The pure in heart are also blessed as they give their hearts completely to the rule and reign of Christ in their lives.\textsuperscript{620} Purity of heart stands in contrast to the external purity exalted by the world. It is found in renouncing humanity’s need to discern between good and evil. The peacemakers are blessed as they renounce all forms of violence.\textsuperscript{621} The disciples are not simply called to be people of peace, but to be people who make peace. They do this by making the decision to suffer rather than causing suffering for others. Those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness will inherit the kingdom. The kingdom of God is an offence to the world – that is why they will be persecuted.\textsuperscript{622} They will receive no civil recognition, but rather rejection, and the blessing of Christ. This blessed community is the community of the crucified. They have no other place in this

\textsuperscript{616} Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 105.
\textsuperscript{617} Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 106.
\textsuperscript{618} Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 106.
\textsuperscript{619} Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 107.
\textsuperscript{620} Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 107.
\textsuperscript{621} Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 108.
\textsuperscript{622} Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 109.
world other than the cross of Golgotha.\textsuperscript{623}

The very nature of the visible church community is referred to in Jesus’ teaching as salt and light. Yet the same earth that is preserved by the faithfulness of the fellowship community with its salt-like presence also rejects them. Regardless of how they are received by the world, the disciples are called into a new way of being. Jesus does not command the disciples to do ‘salty things’; he does not even foreshadow an event which is yet to take place that may require their participation; he simply declares that the disciples are salt.\textsuperscript{624} This is an ontological declaration. And if salt somehow loses its saltiness, if the fellowship community ceases to follow the way of Christ – then it simply ceases to be of any use and is trampled underfoot. The Christ-community without Christ will destroy itself.\textsuperscript{625}

In the same way that Jesus talks about salt so he teaches about light. Jesus does not say that the fellowship community will be light, or that they should be light, or even that they have the light, but simply that they are light. It is the call of Christ that makes them light.\textsuperscript{626} There is no choice here for the disciples. They must be what they already are. Light is visible, so they must be visible. There is no such thing as an invisible disciple. The visibility of the disciples is such that their good works are seen. Their works are the claims outlined in the Beatitudes. The cross of Christ does not bring glory to humanity. There is nothing glorious about it. Instead it brings glory to God,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{623} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge, op. cit.}, p. 109. \\
\textsuperscript{624} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge, op. cit.}, p. 111. \\
\textsuperscript{625} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge, op. cit.}, p. 112. \\
\textsuperscript{626} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge, op. cit.}, p. 112.
\end{flushleft}
because from the cross, “shines the light of the resurrection.”

Bonhoeffer reminds us that Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Christ did not come to implement a better law for the disciples to follow. Christ’s demand is for a ‘better righteousness’ in following the law that was already given. The law and God cannot be separated, but they are not the same thing.

Bonhoeffer asserts that brothers and sisters in Christ must not harbor anger toward one another, and rejects the notion of a subtle distinction between ‘just anger and unjust anger’. The true path of the disciple is that of reconciliation; to be unreconciled in your heart is to be a murderer in God’s eyes. Bonhoeffer also insists that, “Our bond to Jesus Christ permits no desire without love.”

The disciple is to focus on Jesus and then will view others with the love of Christ, rather than selfish desire.

According to Bonhoeffer Jesus forbids the use of oaths because they testify to the existence of lies in the world. Every time an oath is taken it justifies the right to lie on other occasions. Every word a disciple utters is “placed in the unquestionable presence of the all-knowing God.”

Bonhoeffer then turns to the notion of non-violent resistance as a means of overcoming the reality of evil and injustice.

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627 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 114.
629 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 122.
630 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 124.
631 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 125.
633 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 129.
Evil will become powerless when it finds no opposing object, no resistance, but, instead, is willingly borne and suffered… (E)vil comes to an end when we permit it to pass over us, without defense. Humiliation and debasement are revealed as sin when the disciple does not commit them, but bears them, without defense. Assault is condemned by not being met with violence. The unjust claim on my coat is answered by my giving up my cloak as well. The exploitation of my service becomes obvious as exploitation when I set no limit on it. Our willingness to yield up everything when we are bidden to do so is our willingness to have enough in Jesus Christ alone, to desire to follow him alone. Our voluntary renunciation of counterviolence confirms and proclaims our unconditional allegiance to Jesus as his followers, our freedom, our detachment from our egos. And it is only in the exclusivity of this adherence that evil can be overcome.634

Bonhoeffer believed that when we willingly endure suffering brought on by injustice, we overcome evil.635 In a striking claim, he insists that there is no case of evil that requires a different response from a follower of Christ. “The more terrible the evil, the more willing the disciple should be to suffer.”636 Persons who commit evil acts and atrocities are to be handed over to Christ for judgment – the church is not to act violently against them. On the cross, Christ overcomes all evil with non-violent resistance. Followers of Christ are invited into this same resistance, knowing that victory has already been won.

The Sermon on the Mount now refers for the first time to the word which summarizes everything in it: love.637 There is no sentimentality here. Jesus declares we must love our enemies. The concept of loving one’s enemies, however, should not be mistaken as acquiescence. The aim here is to overcome one’s enemies with love and not hatred.638 There is no room here

634 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 133.
635 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 134. “Suffering willingly endured is stronger than evil; it is the death of evil.”
637 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 137.
638 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 139.
for mere platitudes. Bonhoeffer writes that we are to serve our enemies and offer them our goods, our honour, and our lives, as we would to a lover.\textsuperscript{639} This offering embodies what it means to be ‘extraordinary’ (\textit{περισσον}) as disciples of Christ. We are called to love “those who love no one and whom no one loves.”\textsuperscript{640} For the most ‘extraordinary’ thing of course is the love of Christ, the Crucified and Resurrected One, who enables and empowers this love in those who dare to follow him. Thus, the ‘extraordinary’ is a deed that disciples do in obedience to Christ; it is a fulfillment of the law, and it is the act of being blessed by God as described in the Beatitudes.\textsuperscript{641}

\section{5.1.3 The Hidden Character of the Christian Life}

The paradox of followship is highlighted by the call for visibility in Matthew 5, and the importance of hiddenness in Matthew 6. Bonhoeffer draws attention to this contrast when he warns against the dangers of seeking to live extraordinary lives as a form of spiritual arrogance. Instead he insists it is,

\begin{quote}
… not the extraordinary, but rather the completely ordinary, everyday, regular, unobtrusive behaviour (that) is the sign of genuine obedience and genuine humility.\textsuperscript{642}
\end{quote}

The inherently extraordinary nature of followship should not be enacted in order to be seen.\textsuperscript{643} Followship is not a publicity stunt. Obedience to Christ is an end in itself. Being careful not to contradict his own assertions on the need

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{639} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge}, op. cit., p. 139.
\item \textsuperscript{640} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge}, op. cit., p. 144.
\item \textsuperscript{641} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge}, op. cit., p. 145.
\item \textsuperscript{642} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge}, op. cit., p. 147.
\item \textsuperscript{643} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge}, op. cit., p. 148.
\end{itemize}
for fellowship to be visible to the world, Bonhoeffer emphasises that the need for hiddenness is for the sake of the fellowship community itself. It is not that they are oblivious to the extraordinary nature of their deeds, but they do not see themselves in the deeds that they do – only Christ.  

The genuine deed of love is always a deed hidden to myself.  

The hiddenness of fellowship occurs in the way that disciples are called to pray. All prayer is mediated through Christ: “(t)here is no such thing as unmediated prayer.” Insofar as God already knows what I need, my prayer must be ‘thoughtless’ in the sense that I must not myself mediate a prayer that is already mediated through Christ. Thus, 

(p)ray is necessarily hidden. It is the opposite of a public act in every way. When people pray, they no longer know themselves; they know only God, to whom they are calling. Because prayer does not reach out into the world, but is directed solely to God, it is the least demonstrative act there is.  

The disciple is simultaneously the one speaking and listening, and therefore she must be careful not to critique and edit her own prayers. For the disciple to consider whether prayers are worthy leaves no room for God. Of course such hiddenness is impossible. In order to rescue us from ourselves, Jesus teaches us how and what to pray. The Lord’s Prayer is not a formula but a reminder. The fulfillment of all our prayers is found in Christ himself.

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644 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 149. “The righteousness of the disciples is hidden from themselves.”  
647 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 153  
649 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 155.
In him God’s name is hallowed; in him God’s kingdom comes; in him God’s will is done. For his sake the bodily life of the disciples is preserved; for his sake they receive forgiveness for their sins. In his power they are protected from temptation; in his glory they are saved unto eternal life. His is the power and the glory forever in communion with the Father.  

Bonhoeffer now turns his attention to fasting and the need for discipline. Fasting helps to overcome lethargy and arrogance. Opposition to such disciplines is nuanced by such phrases as the need for ‘evangelical freedom’ or the dangers of ‘self-martyrdom’. The followers of Christ need to be reminded that the life of followship is foreign to the world.

Bonhoeffer also emphasises the need for simplicity. Disciples are to focus solely on Christ in all things. They do not concern themselves with Christ and the law, or Christ and holiness, or Christ and the world: their only interest is Christ alone. Those who claim to be His disciples can not serve two masters. It is the very nature of God that you either love God or hate God. Whereas disciples would never readily say they ‘hate’ God, by loving the things of this world – that is, in effect, what they are doing by default.

Jesus summarises the followship imperative when he proclaims at the end of Matthew 6, “… strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”. For Bonhoeffer,

This word of Jesus, like the commandment not to worry, is either an unbearable burden, an impossible destruction of human existence for the poor and suffering – or it is the gospel itself, which can make us completely free and

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650 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 158.
651 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 159.
653 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 164.
654 Matthew 6:33.
completely joyous. Jesus is not speaking of what people should do but cannot do. Rather he is speaking of what God has granted and continues to promise us. If Christ has been given to us, if we are called to follow him, then everything, everything indeed is given to us. 655

5.1.4 The Separation of the Followship Community

The focus of the Sermon on the Mount has moved from the extraordinariness of the followship imperative to the hiddenness of its character; it now focuses on the need for followers to be set apart. This notion of being set apart, however, should never be understood as some sort of superiority. This is why Jesus tells his disciples they are not to judge. Disciples of Christ exist only because of Christ. They have no righteousness of their own, only Christ’s righteousness. Disciples of Christ can only view others as Christ views them. That is, as ones that Christ comes to, and as ones that Christ calls. Because disciples are always following Christ, they never meet a person that Christ has not already met before them. 656 The refusal to judge others, however, should also never been seen as some sort of tacit approval of another’s behaviour, for only God is good 657. The call of the disciple is to love others, to forgive others, to make space for the other to grow in Christ, and to approach others with an unconditional offer of community. 658 Bonhoeffer also speaks of the danger of over-zealous proclamation, 659 for the witness of the gospel must always be from a place of weakness, 660 and the greatest power disciples have

655 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 168.
656 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 170.
657 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 172.
659 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 172.
is God’s promise to them in prayer.661

Bonhoeffer insists that it is not the faith community that separates itself from the world: it is Christ who calls apart.662 The fellowship community will always be few in number; those who live lives of destruction will always be many.663 False prophets will come, but the fruit of their evil will find them out.664 There will be some who prophesy and do miraculous things in Jesus’ name, and yet to whom Jesus responds, ‘I never knew you’.665 For the disciple, to hear is to obey, to be called is to follow; there is no other way. “His word is his grace.”666

5.1.5 The Messengers

Bonhoeffer finishes the Part One of Nachfolge with a short exposition of Matthew 9:35-10:42. His concern here is what disciples do when they are at mission in the world. The ones who are sent have nothing in common except the One who calls them.667 The disciples can only go where they are commissioned to go and, in reality, it is not the twelve who go, but rather the one Jesus Christ who goes out into the countryside in and through his twelve messengers.668 Even as the good news of the kingdom is proclaimed, there will be some who receive it, and others who reject it. It is not for the disciples

662 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 175.
663 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 176.
664 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 178.
665 Matthew 7:23.
666 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 181.
668 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 189.
to decide which is which. What is certain is that disciples will suffer in their witness, because that is the nature of the relationship between the Word and the world. For this reason Christ offers words of comfort, ‘Do not be afraid’. Bonhoeffer insists,

Human beings should not be feared... Anyone who is afraid of people is not afraid of God. Anyone who fears God is no longer afraid of people.670

The disciples, as they carry out the work of the kingdom, become ‘like Christ’ and ‘bearers of his presence’.671 The disciples know that in their witness to the kingdom of God, they have served their Lord, and the fruit of their labour is the very salvation of the church.672

5.1.6 Part Two: The Church of Jesus Christ and Followship

“Jesus no longer walks past me in bodily form and calls, ‘Follow me’”,673 writes Bonhoeffer. But Jesus is still present to us, calling us, and demanding a response. The Jesus of the gospels made quite contrasting demands of the different people he encountered. For some, he called them to follow, for others, he told them to return to their homes.674 How are we to know what Christ demands of us? Who are we to presume anything on Christ’s behalf? Even as these questions seem quite reasonable and indeed justified, Bonhoeffer dismisses them outright.

669 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 194.
670 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 196.
671 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 198.
672 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 198.
673 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 201.
674 Mark 8:26; Luke 8:39.
Every time we ask (questions such as these), we place ourselves outside the living presence of the Christ. All of these questions refuse to take seriously that Jesus Christ is not dead but alive and still speaking to us today through the testimony of scripture. He is present with us today, in bodily form and with his word. If we want to hear his call to discipleship, we need to hear it where Christ himself is present. The preaching and the sacrament of the church is where Christ is present… Indeed he is already present as the glorified, the victorious, the living Christ. No one but Christ can call us to discipleship. Discipleship in essence never consists in a decision for this or that specific action; it is always a decision for or against Jesus Christ.\(^{675}\)

Just as with the first disciples, we hear his call and then recognize Jesus as the Christ.\(^{676}\) Scripture does not present us with a multiple array of messianic voices demanding our allegiance.\(^{677}\) We only have the one Christ – we must listen to Him.

Bonhoeffer suggests that the grand schema of followship that is paramount to the gospel narratives’ account of faith in Christ is almost totally supplanted in the Pauline Epistles by the language of Baptism.\(^{678}\) Bonhoeffer insists that these differing approaches complement one another. They should be read alongside one another rather than seeing them in opposition. Just as the gospel narratives portray Jesus calling people to follow him, so too, Baptism is a divine initiative. In Baptism we find the call of Christ.\(^{679}\) In Baptism we die to our old lives and receive new life in Christ. This death and this new life are both gifts of grace. This gift of death is to join in Christ’s death on the cross, and to die to our sins. This gift of new life is the gift of resurrection and the church as the body of Christ present in the world.

\(^{675}\) Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., p. 201.
\(^{677}\) Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., p. 204. Mark 9:7
\(^{678}\) Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge*, op. cit., p. 207.
For the first disciples the bodily community with Jesus did not mean anything different or anything more than what we have today. Indeed, for us this community is even more definitive, more complete, and more certain than it was for them, since we live in full community with the bodily presence of the glorified Lord. Our faith must become fully aware of the magnitude of this gift. The body of Jesus Christ is the ground of our faith and the source of its certainty; the body of Jesus Christ is the one and perfect gift through which we receive our salvation; the body of Jesus Christ is our new life. It is in the body of Jesus Christ that we are accepted by God from eternity.  

Just as Adam, an individual, bore all of humanity in its fallen state, so too, Jesus Christ, an individual, becomes for us the bearer of a new humanity. “Christ is the second human being in whom the new humanity is created. He is the new human being.” Bonhoeffer insists that the bodily nature of the church is more than metaphor. The body of Christ was not found in the empty tomb because Christ has a new body, the Church. It is only through community with the church, the body of Christ, that community with Christ is possible. For Bonhoeffer this community is realized through the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Through the sacraments we come into community with the person of Christ who is present in the world. The church is the community of the Crucified and Resurrected One and, as such, we share in Christ’s suffering and glory.  

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680 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 213.
681 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 215. See also Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit.
682 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 216. See also Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit.
683 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 218. Bonhoeffer suggests that we need to understand the church as a person rather than as an institution.
684 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 221.
Christ’s suffering in the world.\textsuperscript{685} By bearing the burden of Christ in such a way, the church takes on the cruciform image of its saviour. God did not build the temples that stood in Jerusalem and they have since perished. The church is the holy temple built by God’s own self, the body of Christ, risen and transfigured.

Writing in \textit{Sanctorum Communio}, Bonhoeffer had declared that, “the Body of Christ takes up physical space here on earth.”\textsuperscript{686} The word that is preached, the sacraments that are given, do not exist as some sort of separate entities to the community from which, and for whom, they arise. Rather, the word and sacraments give shape to the body which takes up space.\textsuperscript{687} The first disciples followed Jesus on the road in order to remain in community with him; in the world today disciples are called to the Church to remain in community with Christ. As the community of Christ, disciples form a community of servanthood, just as Jesus came as a slave.\textsuperscript{688}

Bonhoeffer insists that the primary calling of disciples is to ‘do good’ in the world as a witness to the good news of Christ.\textsuperscript{689} Membership in the body of Christ also means submission to those in authority. It can also mean at times submission to suffering, when the call of Christ is such that Church finds itself in opposition to secular rule.\textsuperscript{690} Because it is the Body of Christ, the church is ‘unworldly’, but because Christ is incarnate, the Church’s ‘unworldliness’ takes

\textsuperscript{685} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge}, op. cit., p. 222.
\textsuperscript{686} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge}, op. cit., p. 224.
\textsuperscript{687} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge}, op. cit., p. 229. “The body of Christ becomes visible in the church-community that gathers around word and sacrament.”
\textsuperscript{689} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge}, op. cit., p. 241.
\textsuperscript{690} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge}, op. cit., p. 242.
place ‘in the midst of this world’.

So Christians are called to practise their fellowship, their vocation, in their families, in their workplaces, in their communities; they do so in the ‘world’ knowing that they do so as part of an ‘unworldly’ and yet highly visible church-community. At times, such a practice necessarily and definitively establishes limitations where the body of Christ comes into conflict with the demands of the world. When such a conflict occurs, disciples are called to make a public confession of their faith in Christ, and then to submit to the consequences of the world’s response and, as such, may enter into ‘public suffering’ with Christ for the sake of the world.

The holiness of God can seem a contradiction to the church as the body of Christ because disciples are sinful people. And yet God has set the church apart in order to establish, “God’s realm of holiness in the world”. It is the cross of Christ which justifies God and solves this dilemma.

But living as a baptized people also involves a process of remembering, renewing, and enabling, as each day we follow the call of Christ. This process is the meaning of sanctification. Sanctification involves three things: (i) not to conform to the patterns of this world and be separated from the world; (ii) to walk daily with Christ and to do as Christ does within the realm of

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691 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 245.
692 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 246.
693 Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 254. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 104. Plant suspects that, “as his theological ethics matured, Bonhoeffer began to see considerable danger in speaking as if there was either a metaphorical or a physical space that is ‘Church’ in relation to an entirely separate space that is ‘world’. In his Ethics he would call this ‘thinking in two spheres’. (This) provides a stark spatial image of what has been a strong theme throughout Nachfolge: namely the distinctiveness or extraordinariness of Christians vis-à-vis unbelievers. In prison, Bonhoeffer’s last word on Nachfolge would be that ‘I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. I suppose I wrote Nachfolge as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote.’... Bonhoeffer came to suspect the theological sense in expressing the distinctiveness of the disciples spatially.”
God’s holiness; (iii) to remain ‘hidden’ from the world and to await Christ’s return.\textsuperscript{694} Thus, the sanctified church is one that is highly visible in the space it occupies in the world and its witness to the good news. The sanctified church is obedient to the call of Christ and its suffering in the world and the saints of the church are called to live holy lives.\textsuperscript{695} And the sanctified church is hidden in its ageless practice of the disciplines of faith.

The community of saints is not the ‘ideal’ church-community of the sinless and perfect. It is not the church-community of those without blemish, which no longer provides room for the sinner to repent. Rather it is the church-community that shows itself worthy of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins by truly proclaiming God’s forgiveness, which has nothing to do with forgiving oneself. It is the community of those who have truly experienced God’s costly grace, and who thereby live a life worthy of the gospel which they neither squander nor discard.\textsuperscript{696}

The sanctified church-community stands before Christ, not fearful of God’s wrath, but joyously awaiting the kingdom.\textsuperscript{697} As we wait for the coming kingdom we are not idle. Bonhoeffer insists that, “Grace and deeds belong together.”\textsuperscript{698} God demands good works: they are key to our salvation as people of God’s kingdom; for the kingdom itself is a kingdom of good works. Nevertheless there is essentially only one work that is deemed good, and that is the work of God in Christ that justifies, reconciles and sanctifies God’s people through grace. We are not saved by our own work, but by the work of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{694} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge, op. cit.}, p. 261.
  \item \textsuperscript{695} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge, op. cit.}, p. 263. The saints of the church are not required to be holy, that would be impossible, instead they are called to be holy – and with God all things are possible.
  \item \textsuperscript{696} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge, op. cit.}, p. 269.
  \item \textsuperscript{697} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge, op. cit.}, p. 277.
  \item \textsuperscript{698} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Nachfolge, op. cit.}, p. 278.
\end{itemize}
All our good works are nothing but God’s own good works for which God has already prepared us. Thus good works are, on the one hand, demanded of us for the sake of our salvation; and they are, on the other hand, always only the works which God is doing in us. They are God’s gift.  

Bonhoeffer concludes his thesis in *Nachfolge* by returning to the place where God begins with humankind – that is, being made in the image of God. Bonhoeffer suggests that the image of God that humankind once bore has been lost via the fall of Adam, and through the incarnation God conforms to our image in order for us to truly see what divine love looks like. In the helpless baby Jesus we see the vulnerability of divine love; in the life of Jesus, his teaching and healing, we see divine love at work; in Christ’s death on the cross we see first hand the cost and suffering of divine love; in the resurrection we see the hope of new life that divine love brings into the world. It is Jesus Christ who is in the image of God: the baby born into poverty, the friend of sinners and tax-collectors, the rejected one crucified for the sins of the world, the resurrected one signaling the kingdom come.

… (w)hoever, according to God’s promise, seeks to participate in the radiance and glory of Jesus must first be conformed to the image of the obedient, suffering servant on the cross. Whoever seeks to bear the transfigured image of Jesus must first have borne the image of the crucified one, defiled in the world. No one is able to recover the lost image of God unless they come to participate in the image of the incarnate and crucified Jesus Christ. It is with this image alone that God is well-pleased. Only those who allow themselves to be found before God in the likeness of this image live as those with

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whom God is well pleased.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 284.}

Changing into the image of God is not something we achieve ourselves, by our own efforts; rather, it is the image of God, the likeness of Christ, which begins to take shape in us.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 285.} It is only because Christ is already at work in our lives, restoring, renewing, transforming, rebirthing, that we can seek to walk as He walked, that we can seek to be like Him.\footnote{1 John 2:6.} For Bonhoeffer this ‘form of Christ’ is fully realized in the Incarnate, the Crucified, and the Resurrected One.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 287. See also Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit.}

The follower of Jesus is the imitator of God. ‘Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children’.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 288. Ephesians 5:1.}

\section*{5.2 Life Together}

...our being together with others in Christ is the basis of the certainty of the living God and the assurance of faith.\footnote{Marsh, op. cit., p.102.}

During the time Bonhoeffer spends at \textit{Finkenwalde}, his theography is shaped by a desire for a realised ecclesiology that exists as the Body of Christ in the world. \textit{Finkenwalde} is the lived experiment of \textit{Sanctorum Communio}. \textit{Life Together}, then, journals this experiment as Bonhoeffer seeks to establish a daily rhythm to life that stands in contrast to the social upheaval and disharmony engineered by Hitler’s Nazis.
Life Together was penned in the autumn of 1938 against the background of the ongoing Nazi persecution of the Confessing Church and the gathering preparations for war. In many ways, Life Together is as much a polemic against the pervasive National Socialist agenda as it is a prescriptive of Christian community. Bonhoeffer refutes the Nazi claim of *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer* (one people, one nation, one leader), and instead positions the Christian community as that which ‘stands apart’ for the sake of the world.\(^{708}\)

In a matter of four weeks Bonhoeffer was able to compose a manuscript that drew upon the collective learnings of the experience of the Finkenwalde Seminary, and the Brothers’ House. Life Together gives an insight into the daily rituals and practices of community life within the underground seminary movement associated with Bonhoeffer. It also “makes a distinctive contribution to our understanding of Bonhoeffer’s theological ethics: it shows how they are rooted for the Christian in an individual and communal life of prayer and worship.”\(^{709}\)

### 5.2.1 Community

Bonhoeffer begins his treatise on the praxis of Christian community by citing Psalm 133, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity.” Bonhoeffer is quick to point out, however, that Christians must not take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians, for indeed the call of

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\(^{708}\) Bucher, *op. cit.*, p. 7. “The Church soon became aware of the fact that National Socialism was competing with it on its own grounds – the religious formation of life.”

Christ is to live among enemies.\textsuperscript{710} The Christian community is always at the beck and call of Christ.

Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian community that is more than this, and none that is less than this.\textsuperscript{711} For Bonhoeffer Christian community means three things: (i) a Christian needs others for the sake of Christ; (ii) a Christian can only come to others through Christ; (iii) a Christian is elected in Christ from eternity to eternity. First, Bonhoeffer insists that salvation is external to the Christian, and is found in Christ alone.\textsuperscript{712} Yet Christians need one another, because the word of salvation is always placed in the mouths of others.\textsuperscript{713} We need to hear words of encouragement and hope from one another – not our words, but the words of Christ on one another’s lips. Second, Bonhoeffer also believes that it is only through Christ that we are truly reconciled to each other and to God. Thirdly, it is through the power of the incarnation that we join with Christ in the reconciling of the world. “… where he is, there we are too – in the incarnation, on the cross, and in his resurrection.”\textsuperscript{714} Christian community is not some sort of esoteric. The church is the incarnation of the Body of Christ in the world. As we join with him now in his ministry of reconciliation in the world, so too, we join with him in the eternal community of worship.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{710} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT} op. cit., p. 27.
\item \textsuperscript{711} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 31.
\item \textsuperscript{712} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 31. Christians, “know that God’s Word in Jesus Christ pronounces them guilty, even when they feel nothing of their own guilt, and that God’s Word in Jesus Christ pronounces them free and righteous, even when they feel nothing of their own righteousness.”
\item \textsuperscript{713} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 32.
\item \textsuperscript{714} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 33.
\end{itemize}
Bonhoeffer is careful to distinguish between the “wishful image of a pious community” and the “spiritual reality of Christian community.” From the outset Bonhoeffer claims that there needs to be clear understanding of these two important principles: “First, Christian community is not an ideal, but a divine reality; second, Christian community is a spiritual and not a psychic reality.” Bonhoeffer talks about the essential moment of disillusionment that individuals and communities need to face in order to become the communities they need to be. This disillusionment is a product of God’s grace.

Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial.

Because the church is created by God in Christ, the appropriate response from the gathered community should be thankfulness. Being thankful in the small things develops character and prepares the community for greater things that may come. The posture of thankfulness brings with it receptivity to the presence of Christ already within the community of faith.

Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ alone, the more calmly we will learn to think about our community and pray and hope for it.

Just as the church is not an ideal, it is also not a human reality. Christian community is a spiritual reality, because it is the Body of Christ living in the

715 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 34.
716 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., pp. 35-36.
717 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 37.
718 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 38.
world, and not a psychic reality based on emotionalism or desire. This contrast is seen in the motivation and praxis of community life and, for Bonhoeffer, it is evidenced most coherently in the relationships that are formed.

Bonhoeffer insists that in genuine Christian community there can never be ‘immediate relationships’ with one another, only relationships mediated through Christ. In communities based on emotionalism and desire, however, these are the very self-serving relationships that ultimately consume and destroy community. Spiritual love and self-serving love are differentiated most when facing hardship. Self-serving love cannot tolerate conflict; self-serving love cannot truly love an enemy. When conflict and opposition are met with self-serving love, truth is negated and enemies scorned, because the ultimate desire is self-fulfillment rather than the realization of genuine love. But it is here, at this point of difficulty, that spiritual love truly begins. Because spiritual love comes from Christ it seeks to serve Christ’s desire and not our own. Because Christ’s desire is so alien to our own, spiritual love is often the direct antithesis of emotional love. Spiritual love, then, does not desire at all, but serves the will of Christ.

Bonhoeffer insists that one of the great dangers for Christians seeking to share their lives together in community is the allure of pietism.

The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly

719 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 38.
720 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 41. See also Marsh, op. cit., p.134. “For Christ is present in the world as the overflowing love of God, turning us away from self-will and self-determination, outward to life for the sake of others.”
721 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 43.
722 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 45.
The idea of Christian community seems to promise so much, and yet here is the greatest danger of all. The only thing it can and must promise is Christ; all else is folly and deception. Other relationships that are formed in life have an inherent understanding (if they are healthy) about boundaries that are needed between people, and realistic expectations about what can and can not be achieved. Christian communities, however, that seek to fulfill what can not be found elsewhere, in terms of our social and self-centered needs, will only ever self destruct under the weight of unfulfilled expectations.

For Jesus Christ alone is our unity. ‘He is our peace’. We have access to one another, joy in one another, community with one another through Christ alone.\textsuperscript{724}

\subsection*{5.2.2 The Day Together}

Just as the break of dawn brought forth the hope of the resurrection, so too, the rising sun brings forth the hope of the kingdom for each new day. Each new day should begin with worship, because each new day belongs to God. Even though Bonhoeffer believes that each community must be free to shape its own worship time, the essential elements must remain: worship should include time for praise and thanksgiving, the reading of Scripture and corporate prayer.\textsuperscript{725} Here Bonhoeffer makes special mention of the book of Psalms. The Psalter becomes for the church the prayers of Christ. At first,

\begin{footnotes}
\item Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 45. \textsuperscript{723}
\item Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 47. \textsuperscript{724}
\item Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 51. \textsuperscript{725}
\end{footnotes}
we may not be able to pray some of the psalms ourselves, because our circumstances are so different to those who have first written them, but through Christ these prayers become our prayers.

The Psalter is the vicarious prayer of Christ for his congregation. Now that Christ is with the Father, the new humanity of Christ – the Body of Christ – on earth continues to pray his prayer to the end of time. This prayer belongs not to the individual member, but to the whole body of Christ. All the things of which the Psalter speaks, which individuals can never fully comprehend and call their own, live only in the whole Christ… Even if a verse of a psalm is not my own prayer, it is nevertheless the prayer of another member of the community; and it is quite certainly the prayer of the truly human Jesus Christ and his body of earth.726

Bonhoeffer refers to the Psalter as the “great school of prayer”, and offers three ways in which the psalms teach us. First, the psalms teach us what prayer means.727 Prayer is essentially not about what we want or need, but rather about who Christ is, and the fulfillment of Christ’s desire for the church and for the world.

Second, the psalms teach us to pray.728 Our prayers then become the prayers of Christ. When we pray the imprecatory psalms that seek vengeance, we join with Christ who took upon himself the vengeance of the world, and returned insult with blessing. When we pray the psalms of the truly innocent, devout, or righteous, we join with Christ who alone is worthy of such prayer. When we pray the psalms of suffering, despite our own circumstances – whether they be of comfort or hardship – we join with Christ,

728 Bonhoeffer, *LT*, op. cit., p. 56.
the one who has taken upon himself the suffering of the world, and indeed suffered for the sake of the world.

Third, the psalms teach us to become a community of prayer. The psalms teach us that the one who prays never prays alone. By praying the Psalter we join with all who would dare to pray, all who would dare to follow the way of Christ, and most importantly we join with Christ himself.

Bonhoeffer laments that for the most part the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament remain largely unknown to the church. Many Christians complain that the Scriptures are too hard to understand, but that is no reason to disengage. It is an imperative to dig deeper. Each day Christians should read a chapter of the Old Testament, and a half chapter of the New Testament, alongside the Psalms used in prayer. The Scriptures should be read consecutively as the grand narrative of God begins to shape the community of the word. As we do so, we become part of God's story.

Forgetting and losing ourselves, we too pass through the Red Sea, through the desert, across the Jordan into the promised land. With Israel we fall into doubt and unbelief and through punishment and repentance experience again God's help and faithfulness. All of this is not mere reverie, but holy, divine reality. We are uprooted from our own existence and are taken back to the holy history of God on earth... What is important is not that God is a spectator and participant in our life today, but that we are attentive listeners and participants in God's action in the sacred story, the story of Christ on earth... It is not that God's help and presence must still be proved in our life; rather God's presence and help have been demonstrated for us in the life of Jesus Christ. It is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel, in God's son Jesus Christ, then to discover what God intends for us today... I find salvation not in my life story, but only in the story of Jesus Christ. Only those who allow themselves to be found in

729 Bonhoeffer, _LT, op. cit._, p. 60.
Along with praying the psalms and reading Scripture, the worshipping community must also sing together.\textsuperscript{731} Bonhoeffer describes the faith community itself as a song of praise to God and we are invited to join in singing.\textsuperscript{732} When Christians gather together to sing, they are able to speak and pray the same Word at the same time.\textsuperscript{733} We are able to sing what we dare not speak; the One we sing to is beyond the reach of our words. Bonhoeffer prefers singing to be in unison because the reason for the song is found in its meaning rather than its sound. Such “unison singing is much less a musical than a spiritual matter.”\textsuperscript{734} Bonhoeffer believes that it is indeed the voice of the church that is heard in its song.\textsuperscript{735}

Bonhoeffer believes the practice of prayer is the one part of corporate worship that we ourselves contribute. The Psalms are the prayers of Christ, the Scriptures are God’s story, the singing is the voice of the church, but the prayers of the people are our word.\textsuperscript{736} Extemporaneous prayer should always be the prayer of the community and not the individual.\textsuperscript{737} It is a tremendous responsibility to be the voice of prayer for the whole community, and so the one who is praying must also be one that the community constantly prays for.

The gathered community may also like to use ecclesial forms of prayer that

\textsuperscript{730} Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 62. (Emphasis mine).
\textsuperscript{731} Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 65.
\textsuperscript{732} See also Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., pp. 393-394, where Bonhoeffer talks about the musical principles of cantus firmus and polyphony in a discussion about the theology of personhood.
\textsuperscript{733} Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 66.
\textsuperscript{734} Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 67.
\textsuperscript{735} Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 68.
\textsuperscript{736} Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 68.
\textsuperscript{737} Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 69.
have been written by others, but it needs to be careful at this point that this is not in reality an evasion of prayer.\textsuperscript{738} It is all too easy to pray prayers that are “beautiful and profound, but not genuine”.\textsuperscript{739}

As part of its corporate worship, once the gathered community has partaken of the eternal bread of life, it is ready to receive from God the earthly bread that provides for its physical needs. Bonhoeffer identifies three different occasions of the ‘community at table’ that are witnessed to in Scripture: the daily breaking of bread together as part of a shared meal, the breaking of bread together at the Lord’s Supper, and the final breaking of bread together within God’s eternal reign.\textsuperscript{740}

Bonhoeffer makes three more observations in relation to table fellowship. First, the community at table recognizes that Christ is the giver of all good gifts, and is thankful. Second, the community at table recognizes that the bread they share together is for the sake of Christ, for Christ is the true Bread of Life. And third, the community at table recognizes Christ’s presence with them.

Breaking bread together should be a festive occasion.\textsuperscript{741} We should share our meals together with joy rather then self-righteous piety, busyness or

\textsuperscript{738} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{739} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{740} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 72. See also Bucher, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 75, for a comparison to Nazi propaganda and praxis. Michael Ley argues that the Christian Eucharist is replaced by the extermination of Jews as a religious sacrifice. “The Eucharist, however, is no longer carried out symbolically, National Socialist religion practices the ritual in reality; the human sacrifice is carried out in the extermination facilities. This sacrifice is simultaneously an expiatory offering and intended as a new creation.”
\textsuperscript{741} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 73.
shame. Breaking bread together is also a reminder of the obligation we have to share our food with the hungry.⁷⁴²

Bonhoeffer also sees an inseparable unity between the call to daily prayer and the call to daily work.

> Without the burden and labour of the day, prayer is not prayer; and without prayer, work is not work... it is precisely in the clear distinction between them that their oneness becomes apparent.⁷⁴³

The prayer at the beginning of each day extends into the day’s work, not in order to hinder it, but to bring affirmation and significance and joy. The work of the Christian then becomes a prayer itself as an act of lived worship.⁷⁴⁴

At the end of each day, the community should conclude as it began, in corporate worship. The opportunity arises to pray for those in need and give thanks for the gift of the day. The evening prayer should also include a time of confession, to God and to one another. At the end of the day, the community puts its trust in God as they slumber.

### 5.2.3 The Day Alone

Bonhoeffer begins his Christology lectures by declaring that, “Teaching about Christ begins in silence.”⁷⁴⁵ Here, as he begins his chapter on personal spirituality, he once again begins with silence: “The praise of silence befits

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⁷⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *LT*, op. cit., p. 75.
⁷⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *LT*, op. cit., p. 76.
⁷⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *CC*, op. cit., p. 27.
you, O God in Zion”. This citation is most probably Bonhoeffer’s own translation from the Hebrew text. It once more indicates his insistence that the beginning and end of Christian community, and Christian worship, must be Christ himself, and not our hopes, or our needs, or our theological traditions. Christian community should never be seen as a means to an end. It is not something that will heal us, or fix us. Only Christ can bring about the kind of transformation in our lives that we so desperately seek – and only then through a process of dying to ourselves, so that we may be raised with Him.

Bonhoeffer begins with two warnings: “Whoever cannot be alone should beware of community” and “Whoever cannot stand being in community should beware of being alone.” Just as solitude and community should exist in mutuality, so too, it is for silence and speech. Genuine speech creates silence and only genuine silence can give birth to genuine speech.

Bonhoeffer is not talking about the silence that comes from boredom or ignorance, but rather reverence and awe; silence properly understood is the sacrifice of speech. It is silence that comes out of, or under, the Word. Silence prepares us to hear God’s Word and, after hearing the Word, we respond with silence as the Word keeps speaking within us.

Bonhoeffer identifies three reasons for a regular time of silence each day: meditation, prayer, and intercession. Meditation on Scripture is not a time for spiritual experimentation or for the developing of novel ideas. It is a time

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746 Psalm 65:2.
747 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., footnote, p. 81.
748 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 82.
749 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 83.
750 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 84.
751 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 85.
752 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 86.
to sit before the Word and ask the question: ‘What is God saying to me in this
text?’ Mediation on Scripture leads to prayer.

Prayer means nothing else but the readiness to appropriate
the Word, and what is more, to let it speak to me in my
personal situation, in my particular tasks, decisions, sins,
and temptations.\textsuperscript{753}

Through personal prayer we are able to bring matters to God that are
inappropriate in corporate prayer. And, if our minds wander during this time of
prayer and we become concerned for the needs of others, Bonhoeffer’s
counsel is to let this time lead into intercession. Intercessory prayer is the
process by which Christians bring others into the presence of God.\textsuperscript{754} The
health of Christian community is found in its intercession. Intercession
transforms one’s feelings towards another: it should always be concrete rather
than vague and practiced with joy rather than reluctance.

Daily meditation should happen at a regular time and place, not as a matter of
legalism, but of discipline and faithfulness.\textsuperscript{755} Bonhoeffer is adamant that the
spiritual discipline of personal meditation is a litmus test for the community as
a whole. Rather than a theoretical or idealistic goal, it creates the very fabric
of the lived experience of community itself.

Every member serves the whole body, contributing either to
its health or to its ruin, for we \textit{are} members of one body not
only when we want to be, but in our whole existence.\textsuperscript{756}

Bonhoeffer concludes this chapter with a beatitude based on the Word of God
that is manifest in the heart of the community: “Blessed are those who are

\textsuperscript{753} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{754} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{755} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{756} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 92.
alone in the strength of the community. Blessed are those who preserve
community in the strength of solitude.”

5.2.4 Service

Bonhoeffer laments the discord that can often arise when Christians in
community see each other as competitors or adversaries. The same conflict
that arose among the disciples in Luke 9:46 as they argued about ‘who is the
greatest’, occurs each time Christians come together. This is the struggle of
self-justification; Christians engage in this struggle by comparing and
competing with one another, and by judging and condemning one another.

Bonhoeffer believes the most effective way to defeat evil thoughts is to never
verbalize them (except when confessing sin). With this in mind, he
implores Christians who live in community with one another never to speak
about a sister or brother in secret, even under the pretense of good-will.
Rather, Bonhoeffer teaches that Christians should always expect to discover
the image of God in one another, often in unexpected ways.

Each community needs both the strong and the weak, the talented and the
untalented, the pious and the less pious, and each person has a role to play.

“A community, which permits within itself members who do nothing, will be

757 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 92.
758 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 94. “Self justification and judging belong together in the same
way that justification by grace and serving belong together.”
759 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 94.
760 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 95. “I can never know in advance how God’s image should
appear in others. That image always takes on a completely new and unique form whose
origin is found solely in God’s free and sovereign act of creation. To me that form may seem
strange, even ungodly. But God creates each person in the image of God’s Son, the
Crucified, and this image, likewise, certainly looked strange and ungodly to me before I
grasped it.”
destroyed by them.” The community that is governed by an ethos of justification through grace understands the importance of servanthood; and with servanthood comes humility. Humility is borne from the recognition of sinfulness. The individual must join with Paul in claiming the title of the ‘the worst of sinners’. From this starting point Bonhoeffer offers three ministries that are essential for the well-being of Christian community.

The most important ministry that one can offer to another is the gift of listening.

Just as our love for God begins with listening to God’s Word, the beginning of love for other Christians is learning to listen to them. God’s love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives us God’s Word, but also lends us God’s ear.

By not listening to other people, Christians are in danger of not listening to God: not listening leads to the death of spiritual life. In this same way, impatient listening, listening with half-an-ear which already assumes a spoken response, is a form of despising other people.

Following on from the service of listening is the ministry of helpfulness. Bonhoeffer believes that God sends people in need to interrupt our daily lives as a gift. If individuals are too busy to help those in need, they are too busy for God. Our time is not our own. It must be freely given in service to God.

761 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 96.
762 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 98.
763 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 98.
764 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 98.
765 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 99.
766 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 99.
767 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 100. “It is a strange fact that, of all people, Christians and theologians often consider their work so important and urgent that they do not want to let
The service of helpfulness leads to the ministry of bearing one another’s burdens.\textsuperscript{768} For Bonhoeffer the law of Christ is a law of forbearance, of suffering and enduring. “Only as a burden is the other a brother or sister and not just an object to be controlled.”\textsuperscript{769} Just as it was the burden for others that led Christ to the cross, so too, the burden of others is the will of Christ for us. The burden of the other is found in their freedom and in their sinfulness. The Christian is called to bear the freedom of the other, to give space for opinions and practices that may be incongruent to one’s own, and also to bear the sinfulness of the other, through the practice of love, acceptance and forgiveness.

The service of forbearance leads to the necessity of the ministry of forgiveness.\textsuperscript{770} Forgiveness needs to happen on a daily basis, as a gift from one to the other. Forgiveness properly understood is a gift of mutuality. For the one who offers forgiveness in community, knows full well that they themselves are being upheld by the forgiveness of others.

For Bonhoeffer, the gifts of listening and helpfulness, forbearance and forgiveness lead to the most important ministry of all – that is, ministry of the Word.\textsuperscript{771} Bonhoeffer is not referring to the ministry of preaching or to ordination, or to any particular office of the church. He is concerned here with the ‘free word’ offered from person to person in each particular time and place. It is only the one who has listened well, who has practised helpfulness

\textsuperscript{768} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 100. See also Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, op. cit., p. 219, where Bonhoeffer explains that ‘responsibility’ for others is living in response to God’s goodness.
\textsuperscript{769} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 100.
\textsuperscript{770} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 103.
\textsuperscript{771} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 103.
and forbearance, and who has been able to bless the other with forgiveness who is able to speak the gift of God’s Word into the life of another. We talk to one another as sinners in need of grace. It is only as we learn to receive the words that others may have for us, that we are able to be in a position to gift what we hope may be God’s Word for another.772

To minister and to serve in the life of the Christian community is tantamount to belonging. According to Bonhoeffer, it is only when we are listening, helping, forbearing and proclaiming that we are serving one another the way we should. All too often Christian communities gather around particular personalities or giftedness,773 but authority does not come from a person’s individual abilities. It comes from faithfulness to the way of Christ.

5.2.5 Confession and the Lord’s Supper

Bonhoeffer once more begins with reference to Scripture: ‘Confess your sins to one another’.774 Bonhoeffer believes that community is destroyed by pious believers. It is only possible for repentant sinners. Bonhoeffer reminds us that the mask we wear before others will not hide us from God. In Christ every pretence comes to an end. The gathered community becomes a community of truthfulness when the secrets that we try to hide, the sins that

772 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 105.
773 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 106. “Every personality cult that bears the mark of the distinguished qualities, outstanding abilities, powers, and talents of an other, even if these are of a thoroughly spiritual nature, is worldly and has no place in the Christian community of faith; indeed, it poisons that community. The longing we so often hear expressed for ‘episcopal figures’, ‘priestly people’, ‘authoritative personalities’, often stems from a spiritually sick need to admire human beings and to establish visible human authority because the genuine authority of service appears to be too insignificant.”
774 James 5:16.
we cover-up, the shame that we try to deny, is confessed and made known. Christ gives his followers the authority to forgive sins, so that the community of faith can live in truth.\textsuperscript{775}

...Christ made us into the community of faith, and in that community Christ made the other Christian to be grace for us. Now each stands in Christ's place. In the presence of another Christian I no longer need to pretend. In another Christian's presence I am permitted to be the sinner that I am... through Christ other Christians have become Christ for us in the power and authority of Christ's commandment... Another Christian hears our confession of sin in Christ's place, forgives our sins in Christ's name... When I go to another believer to confess, I am going to God.\textsuperscript{776}

Bonhoeffer frames his discussion of confession by what he describes as four different breakthroughs. First, confession brings a breakthrough to community.\textsuperscript{777} Sin isolates people; it takes them from community. Unconfessed sin remains hidden and hides the sinner in the shame of their own sinfulness. On the other hand, confessed sin is borne by the community. The very act of confession allows people to enter into community. Bonhoeffer is not advocating public confession, but rather confession between two believers.\textsuperscript{778} In this way, community between two believers becomes an entry point into the congregation itself. Through confession the sinner is never alone again.

\textsuperscript{775} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 109.  
\textsuperscript{777} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 110.  
\textsuperscript{778} Bonhoeffer, \textit{LT}, op. cit., p. 110.  "In the other Christian to whom I confess my sins and by whom my sins are declared forgiven, I meet the whole congregation."
Second, confession brings a breakthrough to the cross. Bonhoeffer believes that pride is the root of all sin; through confession the sinner enters into a form of profound humiliation that defeats the power of pride itself. Our pride, and indeed our old humanity, dies with Christ through the power of confession and we are then enabled to share in the glory of the resurrection itself.

Third, confession leads to a breakthrough to new life. Confession instigates a break from the past; it allows us to give up our old lives in order to follow Christ. In this way confession is conversion: a renewal of the joy of Baptism.

Fourth, confession brings about a breakthrough to assurance. Confessing before another sinner helps guard against self-confession, self-forgiveness and self-justification. Bonhoeffer believes that most Christians simply live with the illusion of bringing their confession before God. Confessing before another breaks the cycle of self-deception. God gives us the assurance of our forgiveness through one another.

Bonhoeffer suggests using the Ten Commandments as a basis for confession, and insists that confession must concentrate on specific sins. If the sins confessed are vague and painless, then the forgiveness given will be

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779 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 111.
780 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 112.
781 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 112.
782 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 112.
783 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 113.
784 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 113. “Those who confess their sins in the presence of another Christian know that they are no longer alone with themselves; they experience the presence of God in the reality of the other… (T)he promise of forgiveness becomes fully certain to me only when it is spoken by another believer as God’s command and in God’s name. Confession before one another is given to us by God so that we may be assured of divine forgiveness.”
meaningless and empty. All who live in the shadow of the cross know the horror of their own sin; they are never judgmental when hearing the confession of another; for no-one’s sin is greater than my own. It is not worldly wisdom, education, achievement, or experience in life that qualifies someone to hear my confession, but rather their experience of the cross of Jesus.

Bonhoeffer believes the confessing community needs to guard itself against two specific dangers. The first danger concerns the one who would hear the confession. Contrary to Roman Catholic practice Bonhoeffer does not think it is wise for only one person in the community to hear the confessions of others. He believes that only those who offer their own confession should hear the confession of others. It is a responsibility that the whole community should bear for one another. The second danger is related to the one bringing their confession. Each individual confessor needs to guard against the temptation of ever thinking of confession as somehow an end in itself. Confession is not a means to holiness. The act of confession, and the forgiveness of sin, should only ever be seen as a means of God’s grace, and never as a product of individual piety.

Bonhoeffer ties his teaching of confession with the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Confession is the appropriate way to prepare as individuals, and as a community, for the sharing of the sacrament. Through confession and forgiveness of sin there is the possibility of reconciliation, which is the fruit of the gospel itself.

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787 Bonhoeffer, *LT*, op. cit., p. 117.
5.3 The Praxis of Costly Followship

These two texts, Nachfolge and Life Together, are significant landmarks in Bonhoeffer's theography. Out of his personal experience he is effectively refining what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ in three spheres: the church, the academy and the public domain. The latter is fast increasingly totalitarian, and as a result the former are in danger of losing their identities in benign acquiescence to the state. In response, Bonhoeffer has sharpened his thinking on grace and the costly nature of followship. This followship is not a case of membership. It is instead an ‘incarnated’ response to the call to follow.

Bonhoeffer chooses to begin Nachfolge with a treatise on grace. By doing so he identifies the imperative of followship as an activity instigated by God in Christ. Bonhoeffer applies his Christological hermeneutic (the Incarnate, Crucified, Resurrected One) to his understanding of grace in a way that challenges the prevailing hegemony of the National Socialists and the German Christians held captive by the politics of time and place. The Christ of Scripture, then, encounters people in their daily lives and calls them to follow. Christ does not join with them in their stories, but rather they join Christ in the grand narrative of the reconciliation of the world.

The dangers of abusing such a hermeneutic through subjective reading, cultural bias, fear and ignorance are easily identified. Bonhoeffer thus methodically applies this hermeneutic to a close reading of the Beatitudes from Matthew’s gospel to discern what Christ would be saying to the church in
‘today’s world’. Of course, we can read his approach today, with our own distance of time and space, and deduce that Bonhoeffer’s cultural context is biasing the conclusions he reaches. That way of reading would be to understand his hermeneutic backwards. It is not that Bonhoeffer’s context biases his conclusions, but rather it is that the call of Christ comes to Bonhoeffer in his own context. The call of Christ is always contextual even as the story of Christ is eternal.

As Walter Wink writes so convincingly in his trilogy on the powers, what is at stake here between Bonhoeffer and Hitler is not a particular historic or even contextual conflict, but rather a timeless struggle between faithfulness and idolatry.

We do not understand the real dynamics of idolatry – that when a nation is made a god it becomes a god, not just as the inner convictions of individuals, but as the actual spirituality of the nation itself. We do not comprehend what is unleashed when millions of people worship the state as absolute; we do not discern the spiritual reality such idolatry actually creates. And because we do not believe, as all ancient peoples believed, that there are gods behind the states, we have nowhere to locate the centre to which all this false devotion flows. We believe idolatry is something idolaters do, but we deny that they do it toward anything real. Thus we offer up countless new bodies to be sacrificed to the gods whose existence we deny, in order to make and keep the world safe for our nations and their interests.⁷⁸⁸

The call of Christ is always over and against the power of Pharaoh, and Caesar, and Hitler, and yet for each and every age the identity of these antichrists is not always so easily discerned. Nor is the path of Christ’s leading. By way of response Bonhoeffer understands the Beatitudes of Christ

provide a mandate for living that are prescriptive, rather than descriptive. In other words, disciples are always to turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, and offer their cloak, even though these offerings may look differently in different contexts. Disciples do these things in response and obedience to Christ, who is ever present, in every context.

The prescriptive nature of our reading of texts like the Beatitudes, then, is not because of a foundationalist approach to ethics, but rather because of the Lordship of Christ who is present in the world. We are called to follow Christ by Christ Himself, and our response must be complete and comprehensive. But what this looks like will differ according to the context in which our journey begins. In this sense, followship is always about becoming.

It is for this reason that *Life Together* and *Nachfolge* are so important. They not only provide instruction on living as a disciple of Christ. They also provide a portrayal: this is what followship looks like. Developing a Christological hermeneutic through which to read the world is something that needs to be formed in community, and a community that so reads the world, needs in turn to be formed by its reading of Scripture. This is what it means to be church: a community so shaped by the story of Christ that it becomes the story itself.

Bonhoeffer’s texts are a far cry from the social and political location of contemporary Australia. Nevertheless the theological setting in which he finds himself draws out some abiding concerns of what might constitute the praxis of followship in every time and place. *Nachfolge* and *Life Together* provide insight into how we might interpret followship for our own context, whatever context that may be.
Chapter Six:
The Ethics of Followship

From 1939 onwards Bonhoeffer's theography was lived out in a context of burgeoning war and threat to self. Towards the end of the war he paid the price for the cost of his particular path of followship and was put to death by the rival claim to power and lordship. That surface narrative disguises the redemptive work which is found in the silence and otherness of the transcendent call to follow and be a disciple of the Word which must speak first. It is during this period that Bethge suggests that Bonhoeffer,

accepted the burden of collective responsibility for the privilege of his own aristocratic heritage in the midst of the tragedy and turmoil of Nazi Germany, and entered fully into his contemporary world in the hope of somehow serving to give shape to its future: In 1939 the theologian and Christian became a man for his times.\textsuperscript{789}

Bonhoeffer understands Christ the Incarnate One establishes an ‘ontological coherence’ of God’s reality with the reality of the world.\textsuperscript{790} In other words, the reality of the Kingdom of God becomes the reality of the world as followers of Christ dare to live Kingdom-oriented lives. Carl Braaten would later refer to this followship discipline as \textit{eschatopraxis}: living the Kingdom ahead of time.\textsuperscript{791}

\textsuperscript{789} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 677.
Bonhoeffer's realised Christology is described by Larry Rasmussen as kenotic Christology, “the whole fullness of God is found precisely in the earthly, human life of Jesus.”\textsuperscript{792} But it is not that Christ somehow relinquishes his divinity in the person of Jesus, rather it is in the personhood of Jesus, and Jesus’ life lived in the world, that Christ’s divinity is fully revealed. Following Christ then, followship, is only fully realised by following Jesus in the world.

For Bonhoeffer, conforming to Christ and conforming to reality are one and the same.\textsuperscript{793} Following Jesus is an ethical practice as much as it is a devotional one. The question at the heart of his ethical approach, ‘Who is Christ for us today?’ will provide different answers for those who dare to ask, not because Christ changes, but because we change. In this respect, Bonhoeffer’s ethical praxis is contextual. But it is more than that. Ethical practice is about obedience rather than deliberation. According to Rasmussen, it is also sacramental.

What the sacrament is for the preaching of the gospel, the knowledge of firm reality is for the preaching of the command. \textit{Reality is the sacrament of command.}\textsuperscript{794}

Obedience, faithfulness and reality, these are the words that concern Bonhoeffer in relation to ethical praxis. His theography is one that integrates his dedicated learning in the academy, his faithful belonging to the Body of Christ, and his courageous engagement with the reality of the world. Bonhoeffer himself senses that he lives in a ‘world come of age’ but he remains unconvinced as to whether the church is ready for the challenge.

\textsuperscript{792} Rasmussen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 16.  
\textsuperscript{793} Rasmussen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 22.  
\textsuperscript{794} Rasmussen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
‘Are we of any use?’ he asks. Bonhoeffer gave his life in pursuit of the answer.

As Bethge writes,

In 1932 he found his calling, in 1939 his destiny.

6.1 Ethics

... I... sometimes think that my life is more or less behind me and all I have left to do is complete my Ethics.

Made up of thirteen, predominantly ‘first draft’, manuscripts, composed over a period of persecution from September 1940 through to April 5, 1943, the Ethics is widely regarded as Bonhoeffer’s magnum opus. Ethics is best understood as the culmination of Bonhoeffer’s theological development. It reaches back to his understanding of the church as the Body of Christ in Sanctorum Communio and his concept of personhood in Act and Being. It builds on the imago relationis (the image of God as understood through relationship with others), and the ‘orders of preservation’ over against the ‘orders of creation’ that he developed in his lecture series Creation and Fall. The theological anthropology proposed in his Christology lectures, and the

795 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 52.
797 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 222.
798 Bonhoeffer, D., Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6: Ethics, Augsburg Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2008. (Referred to as DBWE Vol 6 from here on), p. 25. The manuscript we have of the chapter entitled ‘History and Good’ was rewritten.
Biblical praxis exegeted in Nachfolge and demonstrated in Life Together all find their zenith in Ethics.\textsuperscript{800}

At its heart Ethics, is shaped by a radically realized Christology. Time and again, Bonhoeffer draws upon the formula of Christ as the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One, not only as an ecclesial identifier for the church as the Body of Christ, but also as a sign of Christ’s presence already in the world. This is the primordial hermeneutical key that he uses for reading both the church and the world. For Bonhoeffer God has become human in Christ so that we could become divine\textsuperscript{801} – and, also, so that humankind could be reconciled to its own lost humanity and become truly human once more. It is becoming human in Christ, against a background of tyranny, oppression and persecution that Ethics seeks to imagine.

6.1.1 Ethics as Formation

The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge.\textsuperscript{802}

The opening sentences of Bonhoeffer’s ethics (as above) seem to contradict the very notion of what we might assume a treatise on ethics should be about. For Bonhoeffer there is a gaping chasm between the praxis of Christian ethics and following a purely philosophical approach. Christian ethics does not concern itself with knowledge of good and evil, because our creation narrative

\textsuperscript{800} See also Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 6, op. cit., pp. 3-5.
\textsuperscript{801} Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 6, op. cit., p. 6.
\textsuperscript{802} Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 21. See also Plant, op. cit., p. 50. Plant discusses the influence of Nietzsche in Bonhoeffer’s theology, in particular, Beyond Good and Evil.
reminds us that this is the very thing that separates us from God. Instead the goal of Christian ethics is formation into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Whereas secular ethics investigate such approaches as reason, moral fanaticism, conscience, duty, free responsibility, and silent virtue – in the end all are futile. Bonhoeffer compares these attempts at ethics to the futile adventures of Don Quixote, fancifully courageous, and yet ill-equipped to tackle opponents he cannot even imagine or comprehend. Our task is to replace the rusty swords of Don Quixote style philosophical ethics with sharp ones. For Bonhoeffer the sharpened sword of Christian ethics is to pursue the will of God. The wise person sees beyond rules and principles at this point and instead comes before Christ Incarnate.

When Bonhoeffer talks about ‘formation’ here he is not referring to imitation. That represents an act of humankind to become like Jesus. Bonhoeffer is concerned with transformation, which is a process instigated by the Divine in order to become as Jesus.

It is achieved only when the form of Jesus Christ itself works upon us in such a manner that moulds our form in its own likeness (Gal 4:19). Christ remains the only giver of forms... But just as we misunderstand the form of Christ if we take Him to be essentially the teacher of a pious and good life, so, too, we should misunderstand the formation of man if we were to regard it as an instruction in the way in which a pious and good life is to be attained. Christ is the Incarnate, Crucified and (Resurrected) One whom the Christian faith confesses. To be transformed in His image (2 Cor 3:18, Phil 3:10, Rom 8:29, 12:2) this is what is meant by the formation of which the Bible speaks.

803 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 22. See also Bonhoeffer, CF op. cit.
804 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., ch 3 pp. 66-120. ‘Ethics as Formation’.
805 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 70.
806 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 82. (Emphasis mine). See also Plant, op. cit., p. 114. “If ethics were truly a matter of my goodness and of making the world good through my actions, then I would be the ultimate reality, the centre of the universe! In the sharpest contrast, Christian ethics sets out from the claim that both ‘I’ and ‘my’ world are embedded in the
According to Bonhoeffer the world seeks to overcome problems such as sin, guilt and shame through the pursuit of success, but the gospel of Christ overcomes this. “The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard.”

Instead Christian ethics pursues, …the willing acceptance of God’s judgment. Only in this judgment is there reconciliation with God and other men. Christ confronts all thinking in terms of success and failure with the man who is under God’s sentence…

Thus, Christian ethics rightly considered does also not concern itself with rule-following (and the success or failure thereof) but primarily with the process of formation. This process is not in and of itself concerned with individual piety or self-actualization; it is the process by which the gathered community of believers becomes the Church. It is also the process by which the Church comes to understand its identity as an image bearer of the Divine, and a witness to the world.

‘Formation’ consequently means in the first place Jesus’ taking form in His Church. What takes form here is the form of Jesus Christ Himself. The New Testament states the case profoundly and clearly when it calls the Church the Body of Christ. The body is the form. So the church is not a religious community of worshippers of Christ but is Christ Himself who has taken form among men. The Church can be called the Body of Christ because in Christ’s Body man is really taken up in Him, and so too, therefore are all mankind. The Church, then, bears the proper form which is in truth the proper form for all humanity. The image ultimate reality of God, who alone is creator, reconciler, and redeemer. The aim of Christian ethics then becomes ‘the realization of the revelational reality of God in Christ’. The only good that matters – the only goal to which ethics should aim – is therefore human participation in the reality of God.”

807 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 78.
808 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 79.
Bonhoeffer believes that the formation process is one that involves three distinct ‘markers’. These markers give shape to the Church as it is formed into the image of Christ, and as it begins to occupy the space that Christ takes up in the world. For Bonhoeffer, Christ, and as such the Church is always the Incarnate, Crucified and Resurrected One.

To be formed as the Incarnate One is to become a ‘real’ person in the world. To be real is to give up delusions of grandeur and preoccupation with power and prestige. Incarnation means no more pretence, or hypocrisy, or self-violence. Incarnation allows humankind to be human, and remembers that God became one of us. To be formed into the likeness of the Crucified One means to be sentenced to death by God. To be sentenced in this way is to realize that we cannot evade our own woundedness, nor the wounds we inflict on others. It is an acceptance of God’s judgment of sin, not only our own individual sin (if there is such a thing), but the sin of the world. To be formed with the Resurrected One is to be made new before God. To be made new is to realize that through Christ we have overcome sin and death and despair and have been made right before God and others. It is to realize that hope and love and grace prevail – and that, “I live because Christ lives!”

To take on the form of Christ in such a way does not rely on cognitive assent to dogma or creed. For just as Christ is not a principle, or a programme, or an

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809 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, op. cit., p. 84. See also Plant, *op. cit.*, p. 119. Plant compares the polarized approaches of examining Christian ethics in terms of act and being. “Just as Bonhoeffer attempted to reconcile act and being, so in his *Ethics* he sets out to reconcile formation and command.”

810 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, op. cit., p. 82.

811 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, op. cit., p. 82.

ideology, so too, Christian ethics, does not concern itself with abstract ideas or formulas. Christ does not seek to implement a universal ethical system (re Kant’s categorical imperative), but rather makes concrete commandments in space and time. And it is only in the lived love of God, realized and concrete, that the Church is formed and takes up space in the world.

What can and must be said is not what is good once and for all, but the way in which Christ takes form among us here and now.

6.1.2 Ultimate and Penultimate

Bonhoeffer’s discussion on formation in Christ leads him to the categories of what he refers to at the ‘ultimate’ and the ‘penultimate’. Bonhoeffer draws on his Lutheran heritage, “(t)he origin and the essence of all Christian life are comprised in the one process or event which the Reformation called justification of the sinner by grace alone.” For Bonhoeffer the ultimate is the destination or goal of all of creation as it is reconciled to God through Christ Jesus. The ultimate is the eschaton that reaches into the present; the fulfillment of the promises of God. The ultimate is the formation of Christ completed in the Church. To live a life incarnated, crucified and resurrected

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813 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 86. The ethical imperative for Bonhoeffer is “whether my action at this moment helping my neighbour to become a man before God.” Bonhoeffer’s understanding in this regard can be traced back to Act and Being and his insistence that ethical beings only exist in relation to the responsibility they have for one another. See Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit., p. 50.
814 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 72
815 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 87.
816 Pangritz, op. cit., p. 65, suggests that Bonhoeffer’s approach here is an attempt to concretize Barth’s eschatology.
817 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 120.
with Christ is to live a life justified before God. In other words, the, “Christian life is the life of Christ.” This is the ultimate.

But if God’s word of healing and wholeness, of forgiveness and acceptance, of salvation and life everlasting is the final word, there must also be a word that comes before. Just as God spoke creation into being, so too, God speaks creation into fulfillment. Before the ultimate word of fulfillment comes, the penultimate word must prepare the way. The penultimate is John in the wilderness preparing the way of Christ. In this respect, the ultimate determines the penultimate (not the other way round). The ultimate is the water of life from the well that never runs dry; the penultimate is the thirst that cannot be quenched. The thirst does not determine the water, but it motivates us to drink. The ultimate is the goal; the penultimate is the function. The relationship between the penultimate and the ultimate is a dynamic one, the penultimate always serves the ultimate and the ultimate always fulfils the penultimate.

When the relationship between the ultimate and penultimate becomes static, two rigid positions develop, the radical and the compromised. A radical existence only recognizes the ultimate. The penultimate is declared sinful and is denied and condemned. God’s judgment separates the wheat from the chaff, for the harvest time has come. A compromised existence only recognizes the penultimate. The ultimate is seen as distant and removed and as a purely spiritual existence. God’s mercy is regulated and domesticated.

818 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 121.
819 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 122.
820 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 134.
821 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 133.
and controlled. In both these cases the ultimate and the penultimate are mutually exclusive and grace is denied.

But in our everyday living the ultimate and the penultimate exist side by side. Bonhoeffer gives the example of a Christian standing in solidarity with one who is suffering. By standing with another person in the penultimate, we are better able to point to the ultimate that awaits. For Bonhoeffer it is only in the incarnated, crucified and resurrected Christ that we find a solution. Christ is neither radical nor compromised, but there exists in Christ the reality of both Creator and creation, God and humankind.

In Jesus Christ we have faith in the incarnate, crucified and (resurrected) God. In the incarnation we learn of the love of God for His creation; in the crucifixion we learn of the judgment of God upon all flesh; and in the resurrection we learn of God’s will for a new world. There could be no greater error than to tear these three elements apart; for each of them comprises the whole. It is quite wrong to establish a separate theology of the incarnation, a theology of the cross, or a theology of the resurrection, each in opposition to the others, by a misconceived absolutization of one of these parts; it is equally wrong to apply the same procedure to a consideration of the Christian life.

Bonhoeffer insists that the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ must be looked at in their entirety. The Christian life is one where the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ are fully present.

Christian life is life with the incarnate, crucified and (resurrected) Christ, whose word confronts us in its entirety in the message of the justification of the sinner by grace alone. Christian life means being a man through the efficacy of the incarnation; it means being sentenced and pardoned through the efficacy of the cross; and it means living a new life through the efficacy of the resurrection. There cannot be one of these without the rest.... (The Christian life) is an encounter beyond all radicalism and beyond all

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822 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 126.
823 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 130.
compromise. Christian life is participation in the encounter of Christ with the world.\textsuperscript{824}

For Bonhoeffer the way from the penultimate to the ultimate is paved with grace. It is also a path made ready by repentance and enabled by proclamation.\textsuperscript{825} In the end it is not our way to God but rather God’s way to humankind. The Christian life welcomes the ultimate like the dawning of a new day. As each new day follows the night before, so too, the ultimate follows the penultimate. The ultimate cannot be hindered by humankind, just as we cannot hold back the light of the sun breaking over the horizon, but at times we can choose to hide from grace, to stay inside with curtains drawn rather than greeting the new day.\textsuperscript{826} As the ultimate breaks into our lives, it demands, our participation. Not because it ‘requires’ us, but because that is the nature of grace, enabling us to be truly human to one another and forming us into the Body of Christ.

The hungry man needs bread and the homeless man needs a roof; the disposed need justice and the lonely need fellowship; the undisciplined need order and the slave needs freedom. To allow the hungry man to remain hungry, would be blasphemy against God and against ones neighbour, for what is nearest to God is precisely the needs of one’s neighbour. It is for the love of Christ, which belongs to the hungry man as to myself, that I share my bread with him and I share my dwelling with the homeless. If the hungry man does not attain to faith, then the guilt falls on those who refused him bread. To provide the hungry man with bread is to prepare the way for the coming grace.\textsuperscript{827}

In the example above, the provision of bread to the hungry is not grace in and of itself, but it is the penultimate – it prepares the way of grace. The

\textsuperscript{824} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics, op. cit.}, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{825} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics, op. cit.}, pp. 138-140.
\textsuperscript{826} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics, op. cit.}, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{827} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics, op. cit.}, p. 136.
preparation of the way of grace is, “a matter of concrete intervention in the visible world.”828 The things we say and do in this world, we do as Christians, Christ followers, but more than that, we also do as the Body of Christ – the manifestation of God’s grace in the world.

6.1.3 The Body of Christ in the Real World

Bonhoeffer returns to the notion of what it means to be good. Rather than asking such abstract questions as, “How can I be good?” or “How can I do good?”, Bonhoeffer supplants these with what he determines is a more concrete and specific question, “What is the will of God?”829 This question confronts the ultimate reality of life found in Jesus Christ, who is not an abstract idea of doing or being good.830 To engage with questions such as these presupposes an epistemological orientation. To ask questions about the self doing or being good in the world, already assumes that the self and the world are ultimate realities. Thus, the aim of ethics becomes for a person to be or do good in the world in the hope that the world will become good. But if our premise begins with the belief that Christ is the ultimate reality, and humanity and the world are in embedded within the reality of Christ, then the aim of ethics becomes the challenge of making known the reality of God already existing in the world in the person of Christ: the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One.

828 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 137.
829 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 188.
830 See in particular Bonhoeffer, AB, op. cit.
Ethics, as such, is primarily concerned with participating in reality, that is, participating with Christ in the formation of the world. Christian ethics should not concern itself with the antithesis of what is and what should be, for the good is no longer seen as an evaluation of the empirical world. Rather the good finds its meaning in “participation in the divine reality which is revealed in Christ”.  

In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other. The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world, and when I encounter the reality of the world it is always already sustained, accepted and reconciled in the reality of God. This is the inner meaning of the revelation of God in the man Jesus Christ.  

(P)articipation in the reality of God and of the world in Jesus Christ today… must be such that I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world or the reality of the world without the reality of God.  

Bonhoeffer dismissed the Platonic dualism found in notions that separate the good from the real. In Christian ethics, “(t)here is no good without the real, for the good is not a general formula, and the real is impossible without the good.” In the same way he rejects Niebuhr’s concepts of the moral man and the immoral society, for to create a distinction between the two is a fabrication. For Bonhoeffer “an ethic of motives or mental attitudes is as superficial as an ethic of practical consequences.” Christian ethics can never be seduced by the falsity of re-imaging the created order in two spheres.

831 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p.188.
832 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p.193.
833 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p.188.
834 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p.190.
– that is, the sacred and the profane.\textsuperscript{835} To accept such a notion is to reject the belief that God is at work in the reconciling of the world.

So long as Christ and the world are conceived as two opposing and mutually repellent spheres, man will be left in the following dilemma: he abandons reality as a whole, and he places himself in one or the other of the two spheres. He seeks Christ without the world, or he seeks the world without Christ. In either case he is deceiving himself. Or else he tries to stand in both spaces at once and thereby becomes the man of eternal conflict, the kind of man who emerged in the period after the Reformation and who has repeatedly set himself up as representing the only form of Christian experience which is in accord with reality.\textsuperscript{836}

There are not two realities, but only one reality, and that is the reality of God, which has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world.\textsuperscript{837}

For Bonhoeffer it is only in the Church, the Body of Christ, that the divisions in the world are overcome. There is no quantifiable space in the world where Christians can withdraw or hide from the world, and there is no qualitative space (or inner world) that is available either. There is only the world in which God is at work reconciling all of creation. It is in this world that the Church takes up space; it is in this world that the Body of Christ takes up space as the Church.\textsuperscript{838}

\section*{6.1.4 The Four Mandates}

Bonhoeffer’s ethical system relies on the imperative of following the command of Christ in the here and now as a concrete act of obedience over and against notions of adherence to universal principles. We are in error if we assume,

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\item \textsuperscript{835} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, op. cit., p. 193.
\item \textsuperscript{836} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, op. cit., p. 194.
\item \textsuperscript{837} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, op. cit., p. 195.
\item \textsuperscript{838} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, op. cit., p. 199.
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however, there is no sense of continuity or uniformity in his sense of what is right and good. Following on from his discussion concerning the ultimate and the penultimate, Bonhoeffer formulates what he refers to as the ‘mandates’ for life. In many ways the mandates are the canvas, the penultimate is the paint, and the ultimate is the portrait of the Kingdom of God.

Bonhoeffer identifies four different mandates: labour (culture), family (marriage), government and the church. The mandates listed are not to be understood as universal categories; they do not provide some sort of schema or blueprint for ethical behavior. They are essentially a meditation on the statutes of God that help us to identify Christ’s command for the time and place in which we live. In other words, “God’s commandment which is manifested in Jesus Christ, comes to us in the Church, in the family, in labour, and in government.”

Because Bonhoeffer identifies humanity, the Church, and Christ as having a relational ontology (being ‘for others’), so too, ethical discourse is always relational. In this way, Christians understand what they are to do in any given situation because of the relational responsibilities that exist within the mandates through which they are formed into the Body of Christ.

839 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 204. At different points throughout Ethics and also in LPP, Bonhoeffer identifies the mandates differently, and at some points it appears that there are five rather than four, due to the incomplete nature of Bonhoeffer’s writing.
840 Pangritz, op. cit., p. 67, Barth critiques Bonhoeffer’s early concept of the mandates as containing ‘arbitrary’ and ‘patriarchal’ elements, and suggest that they are too heavily influenced by German culture.
841 Brock, B., “Bonhoeffer and the Bible in Christian Ethics: Psalm 119, The Mandates, and Ethics as a ‘Way’, Studies in Christian Ethics, 2005. (sourced at http://SCE.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/18/3/7), p. 11. See also Rasmussen, L. “The Ethics of Responsible Action.” pp 202-225 in de Gruchy, Companion, op. cit., Rasmussen asserts that Bonhoeffer’s mandates are dynamic in nature. They are not concerned with ‘unchanging roles’ as such (and instead are written as a polemic against Nazi propaganda that insisted on ‘family values’) – but act as a ‘media of moral formation’, that structure our existence as being ‘for one another’.
842 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 274.
Thus, the mandates become signposts on the way of Christian followship. For Bonhoeffer the mandates are not derived from reason, or culture, or history, but come to us from the commandments of Christ as witnessed in Holy Scripture. They are not commandments from another time and place but commandments that form the Church into the Body of Christ in the here and now. In this way, the mandates are not static or unchanging, they are purely functional: they are mandates so long as they enable and equip the Church to be for others in the world.

(Bonhoeffer’s) mandates must, therefore, be understood as a heuristic for teasing out, amidst the mixed nature of the historical circumstances we face, the theologically relevant facts of our context in order to situate prayerful judgment about the way forward. The judgment aims not at discerning the ‘absolute good act’, but only the next step in a path of obedience, a path whose end is clear while the middle distance is not. Only so is Christian ethics a journey of faith and hope, and not of sight.

Bonhoeffer’s unfinished treatise on ethics leads him to the point of moving beyond formal rule-following, on the one hand, and situational ethics, on the other. Bonhoeffer’s ethics are an ethics of virtue, but more than that – they are an ethics of followship.

6.1.5 Responsibility

For Bonhoeffer the question of ‘what is good?’ is rendered meaningless because it is always asked from within the closed paradigm of a life lived.

844 Brock, op. cit., p. 23.
Because we are creatures and not the Creator, we are not in a position to qualify or determine what is considered to be good.

We are not asking what is good in itself; but we are asking what, on the assumption that life is a given, is good for us living men. We are enquiring about good, not at all abstracting from life, but by looking deeply into life. The enquiry into good is itself a part of our life, just as our life pertains to the enquiry into good. The question of good is posed and decided in the midst of each definite, yet unconcluded, unique and transient situation of our lives, in the midst of our living relationships with men, things, institutions and powers, in other words in the midst of our historical experience. The question of good cannot now be separated from the question of life, the question of history.\textsuperscript{845}

The question of ‘what is good?’ should never be answered in the abstract, because life is never lived in abstraction. We are not detached from history, but live our lives within history and, as such, any conception we may have of what it means to be good can never be ascertained via an idealized absolute. To overcome this methodological stumbling block, Bonhoeffer revisits the type of questions he asked his students in his Christology lectures from Berlin. The basis of enquiry for Christian ethics then is not ‘what?’ or ‘how?’ but rather ‘who?’. Jesus boldly declares, ‘I am the life\textsuperscript{846} and, as such, he becomes the reference point for our discussion.

The question of what is life gives place to the question of who is life. Life is not a thing, an entity, or concept; it is a person, a particular and unique person, and it is this particular and unique person, not in respect of what this person has in common with other persons, but in the I of this person; it is the I of Jesus.... He does not say ‘I have the life’ but ‘I am the

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{845} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 211.
  \item\textsuperscript{846} John 14:6.
\end{itemize}
life’. Consequently life can never again be separated from the I, the person, of Jesus.847

In Christ Jesus we find unity of life – that is, unity between God and humankind, unity between God and the world, unity between the concepts of ‘good’ and ‘life’.848 The life we live, then, is a response to the good gift of life that we have been given. And just as we have been given the gift of life in its entirety, so too, our response should be one that is lived in its entirety. It is in this way that Bonhoeffer talks about the notion of responsibility which is tantamount to living in response to God’s good gift of life.

The concept of responsibility is intended as referring to the concentrated totality and unity of the response to the reality which is given to us in Jesus Christ... Responsibility means, therefore, that the totality of life is pledged and that our action becomes a matter of life and death.849

Bonhoeffer’s theological method always seeks to orient rather than absolutise his assertions. In others words, responsibility can only ever be understood in relation to others: responsibility to and for God, and responsibility to and for other people. This responsibility is mediated through Christ.

At this point in his writing, Bonhoeffer introduces the notion of ‘deputyship’ or ‘vicarious responsibility’ (Stellvertretung). This idea, however, is actually one of the central themes in Bonhoeffer’s theology dating right back to Communio Sanctorum.850 Bonhoeffer insists that there is no such thing as an isolated individual. Each of us have responsibilities toward one another by the sheer

847 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 214.
848 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 218, “Good is not a quality of life. It is ‘life’ itself. To be good is to ‘live’.”
849 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 219.
850 Bonhoeffer, SC, op. cit., p. 49. et al.
fact that we are alive.\textsuperscript{851} Even the one who lives in solitary has the burden of living responsibly, for each of us represent one another as human beings: we each share in the humanity of one another.\textsuperscript{852} The notion of deputyship, then, is to live for another. In this respect, it is Christ Jesus who is the deputy of us all.

Jesus... lived in deputyship for us as the incarnate Son of God, and that is why through Him all human life is in essence a life of deputyship. Jesus was not the individual, desiring to achieve perfection of his own, but He lived only as the one who has taken up into Himself and who bears within Himself the selves of all men. All His living, His action, and His dying was deputyship.\textsuperscript{853}

To live as responsible people is to live in correspondence with reality. But Bonhoeffer insists that it is Jesus who defines reality for us, for he is the only ‘real person’, all else is abstraction. As such, followers of Christ are called to live in the real world in accordance with the activity of Christ that is all around them.\textsuperscript{854} It is not that the Christian interpretation of reality stands in opposition against interpretations offered by the world; it is Jesus Christ who stands over and against all interpretations because Jesus alone is real. To live responsibly then, is to not to follow a set of rules, or principles, or procedures, or laws – it is to follow a person. Bonhoeffer dismisses the idea of universal

\textsuperscript{851} Zimmerman, op. cit., Referring to Bonhoeffer “...this Christian had become more and more clearly convinced that the substance of God’s actions and the substance of man’s responsibility for his fellow-men was the idea of deputyship; he therefore stakes his life for the liberation of Germany and the world from the curse of murderous tyranny. When, during the war, I saw him for the last time, he was quite bound in the freedom of this responsibility.”

\textsuperscript{852} Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 221.

\textsuperscript{853} Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 222.

\textsuperscript{854} Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 226 “… action which is in accordance with Christ is action which is in accordance with reality.”
or eternal ethical guidelines that we all must follow, and instead insists that we must follow the call of Christ in the here and now.\textsuperscript{855}

For Bonhoeffer responsibility also has its limits. The limits of our responsibility are due to the fact that we are created beings and, as such, we do not create the circumstances or conditions of our actions.\textsuperscript{856} We are also limited by the responsibility of others. Indeed the limit of our responsibility towards another is a gift to the other because it enables them to be responsible in and for themselves.\textsuperscript{857} In this way responsibility is the opposite of violence.

Bonhoeffer recognizes that there will be times when the course for responsible action leads to direct conflict with others, either as individuals, as social groups, or even as the state. In such circumstances, Bonhoeffer appeals to what he calls the extraordinary necessity. There may be times when an individual must act outside the law in order to live responsibly.

There is now no law behind which the responsible man can seek cover, and there is, therefore, also no law which can compel the responsible man to take any particular decision in the face of such necessities. In this situation there can only be a complete renunciation of every law, together with the knowledge that here one must make one’s decision as a free venture, together also with the open admission that here the law is being infringed and violated and that necessity obeys no commandment. Precisely in this breaking of the law the validity of the law is acknowledged, and in the renunciation of all law, and in this alone, one’s own decision and deed are entrusted unreservedly to the divine governance of history.\textsuperscript{858}

\textsuperscript{855} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, op. cit., p. 224.
\textsuperscript{856} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, op. cit., p. 230.
\textsuperscript{857} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, op. cit., p. 231.
\textsuperscript{858} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, op. cit., p. 236.
So, Bonhoeffer insists that along with responsibility and deputyship, there also comes the acceptance of guilt. Just as Jesus took upon himself the guilt of others, rather than seeking to justify his actions, so too, we are to understand and accept the implications and culpability of our own responsible actions: “...every man who acts responsibly becomes guilty.”\(^{859}\)

In this same manner Bonhoeffer also deals with the idea of the conscience. The conscience is that part of us that lies deep within, beyond reason and will, that seeks to create a unity of self.\(^{860}\) Because of this, the conscience is bound by a law of its own making, and stands in opposition to the law of Christ, which is in itself a claim to unity.

When Christ, true God and true man, has become the point of unity of my existence, conscience will indeed still formally be the call of my actual being to unity with myself, but this unity cannot now be realized by means of a return to the autonomy which I derive from the law; it must be realized in fellowship with Jesus Christ. Natural conscience, no matter how strict and rigorous it may be, is now seen to be the most ungodly self-justification, and it is overcome by the conscience which is set free in Jesus Christ and which summons me to unity with myself in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has become my conscience. This means that I can find unity with myself only in the surrender of myself to God and to men.\(^{861}\)

Just as Jesus dishonored his earthly parents for the sake of honoring his Heavenly Father, and broke the law of the Sabbath for the sake of showing God’s love to those around him in need, so too, at times we are to set our consciences free for the service of God and neighbour. To do so, however, is also to take upon oneself the guilt of departing from the law. Sometimes one must tell a lie in order to speak truth, or break the law in order to be

\(^{861}\) Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, op. cit., p. 240. In this regard Bonhoeffer remains consistent with his treatment of the conscience in his earlier writings. See for example, Bonhoeffer, *CF*, op. cit., p. 128.
The difficult choices in ethics are never between right and wrong or good and evil, but between right and right, and between wrong and wrong. Bonhoeffer believes responsibility is freedom in terms of our obligation to God and to others, and that our freedom in Christ is freedom to obey.

The trajectory of this discussion inevitably leads to the place of responsibility in the life of the disciple which, for Bonhoeffer, is tantamount to the Christian idea of vocation. Contrary to the populist understanding of Luther’s teaching on vocation, Bonhoeffer refutes the idea that the Christian disciple is simply called to be faithful and diligent in their earthly duties.

It is not in the loyal discharge of the earthly obligations of his calling as a citizen, a worker, and a father that a man fulfils the responsibility which is imposed on him, but it is in hearing the call of Jesus Christ.

For Bonhoeffer the call of Christ renders all other claims upon one’s life as meaningless and, in turn, it is the call of Christ that actually gives meaning and purpose to the things that we do. It may be, that in some circumstances, rather than demanding greater commitment to the task at hand, the call of

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862 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, op. cit., p. 241. “From the principle of truthfulness Kant draws the grotesque conclusion that I must even return an honest ‘yes’ to the enquiry of the murderer who breaks into my house and asks whether my friend whom he is pursuing has taken refuge there; in such a case self-righteousness of conscience has become outrageous presumption and blocks the path of reasonable action. Responsibility is the total and realistic response of man to the claim of God and our neighbour; but this example shows in its true light how the response of a conscience which is bound by principles is only a partial one. If I refuse to incur guilt against the principle of truthfulness for the sake of my friend, if I refuse to tell a robust lie for the sake of my friend (for it is only the self-righteously law-abiding conscience which will pretend that, in fact, no lie is involved), if, in other words, I refuse to bear guilt for charity’s sake, then my action is in contradiction to my responsibility which has its foundation in reality. Here again it is precisely in the responsible acceptance of guilt that a conscience which is bound solely to Christ will best prove its innocence.”


865 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, op. cit., p. 248. “Obedience without freedom is slavery; freedom without obedience is arbitrary free-will. Obedience restrains freedom; and freedom ennobles obedience.”

Christ is such that a disciple is required to abandon a particular career path, or relationship, or environment. Because vocation is responsibility, and responsibility demands a response of the whole person to the whole of reality, vocation can never be understood as insular or contingent. Bonhoeffer quotes Nietzsche as a reminder that we are called to ‘love the neighbour who is furthest from us.’ The disciple is always called to live responsibly, and in the freedom of obedience, such that the conscience is always surrendered to the will of Christ; the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One.

6.2 Letters and Papers
April 5, 1943, Bonhoeffer was arrested by the Gestapo under suspicion of conspiring against Hitler and the National Socialist Government. Bonhoeffer’s theography has brought him to Pilate’s palace. His commitment to followship and the Lordship of Christ has never been more paramount. As Christ stood before Pilate, so Bonhoeffer stands before Hitler. A Christology that begins in silence is now being questioned. The witness of the Word to ‘a world come of age’ will be tested again and again by those corrupted by fear and the ‘will to power’. During this time Bonhoeffer’s theology takes on a sense of urgency and radicalization. More than Bonhoeffer’s life is at stake; the followship imperative is now on trial.

Bonhoeffer’s Letters and Papers from Prison are an anthology of his writings during his time of internment and interrogation at the hands of the Nazis (April 1943 – February 1945). Mostly made up of personal correspondence to

867 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 252.
868 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 255.
Bonhoeffer's life-long friend Eberhard Bethge, they include astute theological observations alongside intimate personal reflections. Bethge's decision to submit the letters for publication was based on his determination to place Bonhoeffer's theological reasoning within the wider context of his imprisonment in order to more accurately portray the evolution of his thinking.

The latest English edition of the prison correspondence also includes an essay composed by Bonhoeffer entitled After Ten Years. After Ten Years serves as an appropriate prologue to Bethge's collection of Bonhoeffer's various manuscripts and correspondence that comprise the Letters and Papers from Prison, for not only does it correlate to his final months of freedom (being written during the Christmas of 1942), but it also lays the foundation for the reasons of Bonhoeffer's imprisonment: it seems that Bonhoeffer himself becomes the answer to the questions he asks in this essay.

6.2.1 After Ten Years

We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds. We have become cunning and learned the arts of obfuscation and equivocal speech. Experience has rendered us suspicious of human beings, and often we have failed to speak to them a

869 Bonhoeffer's letters lay dormant for six years after the war, hidden in a drawer in Bethge's writing desk. Much of this material was smuggled out of Bonhoeffer's prison cell by sympathetic guards and then painstakingly concealed and stored by Bethge. Because of the personal nature, and indeed the controversial and provocative theological content of much of Bonhoeffer's correspondence, Bethge was, at first, understandably reluctant to publish this material, but eventually the obligation he felt to share Bonhoeffer's ideas with a much wider readership prevailed.

870 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 18. “The 'theological letters' were paramount but not to be understood as standing on their own like a carefully crafted theological tract; they were provisional and fragmentary reflections awaiting further clarification and elaboration.”

871 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit.
true and open word. Unbearable conflicts have worn us down or even made us cynical. Are we still of any use?\textsuperscript{872}

Bonhoeffer addresses the gift of time, “the most precious gift at our disposal”,\textsuperscript{873} and yet a gift that is totally wasted if lessons are not learned, and mistakes are repeated. Just as Bonhoeffer is mindful of the grace that often comes with forgetfulness, such that pain is not relived, he also carries with him the weight of experiences and responsibilities that must somehow be used to forge a future of new possibility and hope. And so, the essay \textit{After Ten Years} is offered as a set of conclusions about human experience (rather than theories or arguments), in the hope that the next ten years could possibly be different.

Bonhoeffer writes of evil that has masqueraded in the guise of light, and of traditional ethical concepts and practices that have been thrown into conflict and confusion. He rebukes the ‘reasonable ones’ who think they can naively “patch up a structure that has gone out of joint”\textsuperscript{874} for their best intentions defeat them. By trying to appease all people, they achieve nothing. He chastises the fanatic for believing that one can “meet the power of evil with the purity of principle.” Bonhoeffer says this is akin to the bull who chases the red cape rather than the one wielding it. To the person of conscience who relies on nothing but their own sense of righteousness, he warns that this will eventually lead to a seductive compromise whereby the salved conscience is preferred instead to the good conscience, and by doing so is led into deception. Bonhoeffer also identifies the one who acts in freedom, as the one

\textsuperscript{872} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE} Vol 8, op. cit., p. 52.  
\textsuperscript{873} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE} Vol 8, op. cit., p. 37.  
\textsuperscript{874} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE} Vol 8, op. cit., p. 38.
who is willing to sacrifice principles for outcomes, and the one who would aspire to virtuousness, as the one who must ignore injustice in order to maintain purity. In all of these cases, Bonhoeffer laments that the human response to the evil they have encountered has been found wanting. There is only one response that can offer resistance and hope.

Who stands firm? Only the one whose ultimate standard is not his reason, his principles, conscience, freedom, or virtue; only the one who is prepared to sacrifice all of these when, in faith and in relationship to God alone, he is called to obedient and responsible action. Such a person is the responsible one, whose life is to be nothing but a response to God’s question and call. Where are the responsible ones?875

Bonhoeffer bemoans a lack of what he refers to as civil courage among the German citizenry to resist the evil of Hitler’s regime.876 Rather than this merely being a case of personal cowardice, he suggests that German culture itself had encouraged a virtue of obedience and subordination to authority, which in turn created a submissiveness that was exploited by those who sought power at any cost. Bonhoeffer insists that Germans lacked the idea of ‘free responsibility’ as distinct from the dutiful acquiescence to ‘career and commission’. He describes this free responsibility as,

founded in a God who calls for the free venture of faith to responsible action and who promises forgiveness and consolation to the one who on account of such action becomes a sinner.877

Bonhoeffer continues his reflection on the lived experiences of the last ten years by making some observations on the very nature of the character of the community of resistance to which he belongs and, in turn, the wider German culture. Bonhoeffer dismisses the idea that ‘notions of success’ can somehow

be ethically neutral. It is often the case that success tends to rewrite history with a more favorable assessment, but this viewpoint should not be determinative of what is considered good. In the end it is the success of the gospel that determines the path of humankind.

Success, after all, makes history and the One who guides history always creates good from the bad over the head of the men who make history.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 42.}

After success, Bonhoeffer examines stupidity, and his assessment is scathing. “Stupidity is a more dangerous enemy of the good than malice”, he writes.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 43.} This notion of stupidity, however, has nothing to do with measurable intelligence. Instead, Bonhoeffer is concerned about the ability to make ethical choices that are good and healthy. For Bonhoeffer stupidity is a sociological problem.

... it seems that under the overwhelming impact of rising power, humans are deprived of their inner independence and, more or less consciously, give up establishing an autonomous position toward the emerging circumstances. The fact that the stupid person is often stubborn must not blind us to the fact that he is not independent.\footnote{Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 44.}

Stupidity, then, is overcome not through instruction or education, but through liberation. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and it is as we learn to live lives of free responsibility before God that we overcome stupidity. People tend to live lives of stupidity when others expect it of them – especially those in power. Because of the ongoing tragedy and trauma that surround them all, Bonhoeffer also warns against the danger of succumbing to what he refers to as a contempt for humanity.

\footnote{Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 42.} \footnote{Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 43.} \footnote{Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 44.}
...through contempt for humanity we fall victim precisely to our opponents’ chief errors. Whoever despises another human being will never be able to make anything of him. Nothing of what we despise in another is itself foreign to us.... We must learn to regard human beings less in terms of what they do and neglect to do and more in terms of what they suffer. The only fruitful relation to human beings – particularly to the weak among them – is love, that is, the will to enter into and to keep community with them. God did not hold human beings in contempt but became human for their sake.881

Despite the seeming futility of the times in which they live, Bonhoeffer still has hope, and insists that evil will eventually undo itself.

That does not mean that punishment follows hard on the heels of each individual evil deed; what it does mean is that the suspension of God’s commandments on principle in the supposed interest of earthly preservation acts precisely against what this self-preservation seeks to accomplish.... In the fullness of the concrete situation and in the possibilities it offers, the wise person discerns the impassable limits that are imposed on every action by the abiding laws of human communal life. In this discernment the wise person acts well and the good person acts wisely.882

Bonhoeffer allows that there may be times of extreme evil when God’s commandments are breached in order to do good, but this should never signify an abandonment of the God’s rule, rather it is an acknowledgement that extraordinary times require extraordinary measures. Whenever God’s laws are transgressed, they should be reinstated as soon as possible.

Along with hope in justice, Bonhoeffer also maintains the value of trust.883

Even though betrayal is everywhere, hardship can become the fertile soil for

881 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 44.
882 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 45.
883 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 47. “For us trust will be one of the greatest, rarest, and most cheering gifts bestowed by the life we humans live in common, and yet it always emerges only against the dark background of a necessary mistrust.”
human character to grow and bear fruit. As character grows, people learn wisdom through personal experience which explains why, when faced with a novel situation, we may inadvertently find ourselves in situations of danger, or lack sympathy towards the suffering of others.\textsuperscript{884} Bonhoeffer assures us that no one person is responsible for all that is wrong in the world, but he does insist that Christians,

\begin{quote}
take part in Christ's greatness of heart, in the responsible action that in freedom lays hold of the hour and faces the danger, and in the true sympathy that springs forth not from fear but from Christ's freeing and redeeming love for all who suffer. Inactive waiting and dully looking on are not Christian responses. Christians are called to action and sympathy not through their own firsthand experiences but by the immediate experience of their brothers, for whose sake Christ suffered.\textsuperscript{885}
\end{quote}

Surrounded by such suffering, Bonhoeffer finds solace in the camaraderie of Christ, who has first suffered for us. Bonhoeffer does not glorify suffering, but rather sees the suffering of his time in relation to the suffering that Christ has undergone for humanity.\textsuperscript{886}

\begin{quote}
It is infinitely easier to suffer in obedience to a human command than in the freedom of one's very responsible action. It is infinitely easier to suffer in community with others than in solitude. It is infinitely easier to suffer publicly and with honor than in the shadow and in dishonor. It is infinitely easier to suffer through putting one's bodily life at stake than to suffer through the spirit. Christ suffered in freedom, in solitude, in the shadow, and in dishonor, in body and in spirit. Since then, many Christians have suffered with him.\textsuperscript{887}
\end{quote}

Because of the war hopes for the future were put on hold. But Bonhoeffer

\textsuperscript{884} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8, op. cit.}, p. 48. “(S)ympathy grows in proportion to the increasing fear of the threatening proximity of danger.”
\textsuperscript{885} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8, op. cit.}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{886} See also Wüstenberg, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 89. Wüstenberg observes that the theme of suffering permeates all of Bonhoeffer’s theology.
\textsuperscript{887} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8, op. cit.}, p. 49.
says that even in such circumstances, Christians are to remember that their future has always been in the hands of God, and not worrying about tomorrow is our free response in faith to the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, rather than a consequence of hopelessness and despair.\textsuperscript{888} Pessimism is easier than optimism – but optimism is the way of hope.

In its essence optimism is not a way of looking at the present situation but a power of life, a power of hope when others resign, a power to hold our heads high when all seems to have come to naught, a power to tolerate setbacks, a power that never abandons the future to the opponent but lays claim to it.\textsuperscript{889}

Bonhoeffer comments that death was not as frightening as it once seemed to be – in fact there seemed an element of kindness to it. There was a sense that Bonhoeffer and his companions were reconciled to the position of facing death, and as such each day of life lived was welcomed as a miracle. This, in turn, created an even stronger desire to invest great meaning into whatever days were left to live.

Bonhoeffer’s wish was that,

… Death will find us completely engaged in the fullness of life, rather than by accident, suddenly, away from what really matters…. It is not external circumstances but we ourselves who shall make of our death what it can be, a death consented to freely and voluntarily.\textsuperscript{890}

At the end of his essay, Bonhoeffer provocatively asks, considering all that has occurred, and our personal and corporate complicity in times of such evil

\textsuperscript{888} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8, op. cit.}, p. 50. “What remains for us is only the very narrow path, sometimes barely discernable, of taking each day as if it were the last and yet living it faithfully and responsibly as if there were yet to be a great future.”

\textsuperscript{889} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8, op. cit.}, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{890} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8, op. cit.}, p. 51.
and tyranny, “Are we still of any use?” The question goes unanswered.

It remains an experience of incomparable value that we have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the perspective of the suffering. If only during this time bitterness and envy have not corroded the heart; that we come to see matters great and small, happiness and misfortune, strength and weakness with new eyes; that our sense for greatness, humanness, justice, and mercy has grown clearer, freer, more incorruptible; that we learn, indeed, that personal suffering is a more useful key, a more fruitful principle than personal happiness for exploring the meaning of the world in contemplation and action. But this perspective from below must not lead us to become advocates for those who are perpetually dissatisfied. Rather, out of a higher satisfaction, which in its essence is grounded beyond what is below and above, we do justice to life in all its dimensions and in this way affirm it.

6.2.2 – Who is Jesus Christ for us Today?

Bonhoeffer’s writings from prison provide insight into the theographical crisis he was facing. Regular interrogation from the Gestapo meant living under constant threat to his personal safety and the very real fear of betraying those he loved and the Lord he served. His letters portray a theological uncertainty born from living in a world far removed from the idealism of his youth, and yet his robust Christology remains. It is the Christ question that determines all others. ‘Who is Jesus Christ for us today?’ continues to be the driving force for his theological and ethical enquiries.

For many Bonhoeffer’s theology from prison seems to be a departure from his

891 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 52.
892 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 52.
earlier writings.\textsuperscript{893} There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the collection we have is, in the main part, in the form of personal correspondence. As such, rather than providing a systematic treatise on particular theological issues, it tends to identify ideas and topics for further discussion and elaboration. In one instance we may find Bonhoeffer raising an entirely new issue for consideration, in another he may be exploring a particular theme he has discussed previously, or re-considering an earlier foray into previously uncharted theological territory. Sometimes it even appears that Bonhoeffer contradicts himself as he develops and refines his ideas, with Eberhard Bethge his trusted sounding board. Because of the hostile environment in which Bonhoeffer was writing, he was also not privy to any substantial collection of contemporary theological scholarship to help shape and refine his thinking. Certainly, Bonhoeffer himself never considered his prison writings to be in any way authoritative or comprehensive.\textsuperscript{894}

Secondly, the collection of writings that we have from Bonhoeffer’s internship is not complete. We know that there are some works that were destroyed, and others that were simply lost.\textsuperscript{895} And, of the material that we do have, it is certainly not developed to the extent that Bonhoeffer would have normally insisted upon.\textsuperscript{896}

\textsuperscript{893} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 854.
\textsuperscript{894} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8, op. cit.}, p. 516, from a letter to Eberhard Bethge dated Aug 23, 1944. “So you are going to the trouble of collecting excerpts from my very tentative thoughts. I think that if and when you pass them along, you will need to think about everything that needs attention, won’t you?... Otherwise you can imagine how happy I am that you are preoccupying yourself with them. How indispensable an objective exchange about all these problems would be now, to clarify things. If and when it comes to that, it will be one of the great days of my life.”
\textsuperscript{895} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 861- 862.
\textsuperscript{896} Bethge, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 862. “Given the nature of these available sources, the inevitable question – often repeated since – was whether these were not fragments of early immature
Thirdly, Bonhoeffer’s context in prison was one of extreme duress. Bonhoeffer’s own future was unclear, and the welfare of those he loved was at times unknown to him. Throughout the ongoing dialogue of theological enquiry and reflection contained within the letters, we are continually reminded of Bonhoeffer’s context, as he relays personal information concerning his hopes and fears, and asks after those who were closest to him. Even from his prison cell, Bonhoeffer seeks to pastor his past students and colleagues, family and friends. There is a sense of immediacy in Bonhoeffer’s theology that allows him the freedom to express his controversial ideas without the usual caution we would normally expect.

Bonhoeffer’s prison writings, however, should never be considered a dramatic departure from his previous thinking. Rather they are an adventurous, albeit at times even reckless, extension of his prior learning and methodology. In many ways, the theological imagination emerging from Tegel picks up some of the unfinished business of Bonhoeffer’s Ethics project. The Tegel experience helped bring stark clarity to some of the more tentative ideas expressed in his earlier writings; it is almost as if Tegel becomes the final canvas on which his theological artistry takes form.

As previously discussed, for Bonhoeffer, the essential question of theological enquiry is Christological. The controversial phraseology from some of his ideas (conceived, moreover, under the probable shock of imprisonment) and thus not to be taken seriously, or whether they present recognizable vision whose influence is correctly growing. It seems to me that what we have is not the mature fruit of a new branch of Bonhoeffer’s work, but it is also more than a vague random attempt. Ultimately only the content of the brief fragments and their reception can decide this.”

897 Bethge, op. cit., p. 856.
898 Bethge, op. cit., p. 859. Bethge compares Bonhoeffer’s statement in Ethics, ‘What is Christian consists of that fact that a person may and should live as a person before God’, to what he writes from Tegel in 1944, ‘Before God and with God we live without God.’
prison letters that have received so much attention need to be understood in terms of the primary Christological question: the question that informs *Act and Being* in 1929, and later shapes his Christology lectures of 1932, “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?” For Bonhoeffer the question of Christ is always about identity: it is the Lordship of Christ that determines the vocation of His followers. For Bonhoeffer Christ’s lordship is not concerned with ecclesial institutions, clerical hierarchies or state sanction. Rather, this Lord exercises his lordship always and solely through powerlessness, service, and the cross. But this lordship is undoubted. Bonhoeffer is not defending a lost lordship and certainly not any lost positions. Indeed, he wants to give up ‘positions’ in order that he can learn to understand anew how the suffering and powerless Christ becomes the defining, liberating, and creative centre of this world. 

The areas of greatest controversy arising from the *Tegel* correspondence come from the letters dated from April 30 onwards. It is during this period that phrases such as ‘world come of age’, ‘religionless Christianity’, and ‘arcane discipline’ are used by Bonhoeffer to both stimulate and provoke. On August 3, 1944, Bonhoeffer muses the ‘Outline for a Book’ of three chapters: Ch1: Taking Stock of Christianity, Ch2: What is Christian faith, really? Ch3: conclusions. This suggested ‘book outline’ seeks to present some of Bonhoeffer’s previous ideas into a short-form (no more than 100 pages) introduction and discussion of the presence of Christ in the church and world. For Bethge this ‘outline for a book’ provides the framework within which to

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899 See also Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 863.
900 See also Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 864.
engage with the theological reflections of Letters and Papers from Prison.\textsuperscript{902}

6.2.3 Taking Stock of Christianity (a world come of age).

Bonhoeffer's theography has produced a followship imperative that is thoroughly integrated into his daily living. This has required the application of a sophisticated and consistent hermeneutic in the reading of both Word and world. It is not enough to know that Christ requires obedience from followers, Bonhoeffer also realises that followers need to know what obedience looks like in the context they inhabit. To do so, they need to thoroughly and intimately understand the world in which they live.

Bonhoeffer's context is far removed from the one that produced the writings of the New Testament, and yet he realises that it has not just suddenly appeared from nowhere. It has evolved and matured. Bonhoeffer summarizes the process by which the world has developed its thinking towards God in four different sections in the first chapter of his 'outline for a book': (a) The coming of age of the human being; (b) The religionlessness of the human being come of age; (c) The Protestant Church and pietism; (d) Morals of the people.\textsuperscript{903} At the heart of Bonhoeffer's thinking here is the phrase 'world come of age'. The particular phraseology used here (borrowed from Wilhelm Dilthey) points to a line of thought that had been developing in Bonhoeffer's theology for many years.\textsuperscript{904} Bonhoeffer observes that the movement toward human autonomy

\textsuperscript{902} Bethge, op. cit., p. 861.
\textsuperscript{903} Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 500.
\textsuperscript{904} Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 426 (fn 14). See also Wüstenberg, op. cit., pp. 73-84.
which began in the thirteenth century and came to fruition post Enlightenment created a world where the God hypothesis was no longer essential in order for people to find meaning and purpose in their lives. Bonhoeffer’s concern was that God-talk was relegated to the so-called ultimate questions of sin and despair and guilt, to which God alone was the answer. By doing so, God becomes the *deus ex machina* which is only ever needed when everything else fails.

For Bonhoeffer the phrase, ‘world come of age’, can only ever understood in relation to Christ as Lord. In this regard, however, he is not only interested in the question of Christ in today’s world, but also the question of humanity: ‘Who are you today?’ he asks. It is not so much that a world come of age is any better than before, but rather that it has grown up, and as such, must now bear the concomitant responsibilities of its own social and moral development. Humanity in its maturity is to be confronted by God, and it is in this confrontation that humanity discovers who it truly is, and the Christ

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905 *God of the machine*: This is a theatrical term from ancient Greece whereby a mysterious figure would suddenly ‘appear’ on stage (usually with the help of a mechanical device) in order to miraculously solve whatever problems the characters were facing. See also Bonhoeffer, *DBWE Vol 8, op. cit.*, p. 366. “Religious people speak of God at a point where human knowledge is at an end (or sometimes when they are too lazy to think further), or when human strength fails. Actually it’s a *deus ex machina* that they’re always bringing on the scene, either to appear to solve insoluble problems or to provide strength when human powers fail, thus always exploiting human weakness or human limitations. Inevitably that lasts only until human beings become powerful enough to push the boundaries a bit further and God is no longer needed as *deus ex machina*.”


907 Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 867. “In using the phrase [world come of age] Bonhoeffer is thinking of Kant’s formula: ‘The enlightenment is the emergence of humanity from self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one’s own intelligence without the guidance of another person.’

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Bonhoeffer’s theme entails setting out in order to discover the presence of Christ in the world of today: it is not a discovery of the modern world, nor a discovery of Christ from this modern world, but discovering him in this world.

Thus, for Bonhoeffer, the phrase world come of age, is not a philosophical or sociological claim - it is a theological one, and in many ways the secularization of Bonhoeffer’s thinking resulted in an outworking of his Christology, not an abandonment of it.

Bonhoeffer is extremely critical of the church’s engagement with this world come of age. He is concerned that God-talk has allowed itself to be pushed to the margins, and in its place a form of secularized Christian theology made up of ‘existential philosophers and psychotherapists has sought to claim the high ground in search of the ‘ultimate answers’ to the ‘questions of life’. But these are answers to questions that no one is asking. Christian apologetics, in offering a polemic to secularization, is engaging in a conversation with itself.

I consider the attack by Christian apologetics on the world’s coming of age as, first of all, pointless, second, ignoble, and third, unchristian. Pointless – because it appears to me like trying to put a person who is an adult back into puberty, that is to make people dependent on a lot of things on what they in fact no longer depend, to shove them into problems that are in fact no longer problems for them. Ignoble – because an attempt is being made here to exploit people’s weaknesses for alien purposes to which they have not consented freely. Unchristian – because it confuses Christ with a particular

908 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 457. “… one must simply recognize that the world and humankind have come of age. One must not find fault with people in their worldliness but rather confront them with God where they are strongest.”
909 Bethge, op. cit., p. 865.
910 Bethge, op. cit., p. 867. “For him it was the crucified Christ who enabled, judged, and renewed ‘true worldliness’, ‘genuine this-worldliness’, and ‘coming of age’.
stage of human religiousness, namely with a human law. For Bonhoeffer the danger of God being pushed out of the centre of our lives, and onto the margins, is that the God-realm then becomes a private realm. God-talk only concerns itself with the intimacy of our private lives; theological conversations become a type of religious blackmail. Rather than smuggling God in from the peripheries, Bonhoeffer believes that God should occupy the central part of our daily lives, not as some sort of pietistic accommodation, but as a recognition of our true selves.

Thus our coming of age leads us to a truer recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as those who manage their lives without God. The same God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34!). The same God who makes us to live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God, and with God, we live without God. God consents to be pushed out of the world and onto the cross; God is weak and powerless in the world, and in precisely this way, and only so, is at our side and helps us.

Bethge suggests that the power of Bonhoeffer’s assessment of the world come of age is not that it was in itself novel, but rather that he offered a blessing upon the world in acknowledgment for what it had achieved. In this regard, Bonhoeffer is reluctant to use the word secularization, seeing it as a patronizing, and even condemnatory term. Bonhoeffer understood this new phase in humanity’s development as one full of possibilities.

The fact that the world has come of age is no longer an

912 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 429.
913 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 455.
914 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 457.
915 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 478.
916 Bethge, op. cit., p. 868.
occasion for polemics and apologetics, but is now actually better understood than it understands itself, namely, from the gospel and from Christ.\textsuperscript{917}

This understanding of the world, from the standpoint ‘from the gospel and from Christ’, is best mediated through a recovery of Luther’s \textit{theologia crucis} (\textit{theology of the cross}). For it is the crucified God, the suffering God’, that reveals the power in powerlessness, and the redemption of servanthood – in effect, of being for others in the world.\textsuperscript{918}

6.2.4 What is Christian Faith, Really? (non-religious interpretation)

Bonhoeffer believed that, when talking about matters of faith and the nature of God, rather than starting with religious ideals such as omnipotence, omniscience, or omnipresence, we should begin with the person of Jesus Christ as the one for others. Bonhoeffer insists that Bultmann’s demythologising project did not go far enough in its scope. Rather than trying to separate God from the miracles of the Biblical witness, we should be interpreting and proclaiming both with non-religious language.\textsuperscript{919} Thus, for Bonhoeffer, the very language of faith itself must be redeemed for the sake of the world.

What is beyond this world is meant, in the gospel, to be there for this world – not in the anthropocentric sense of liberal, mystical, pietistic, ethical theology, but in the biblical sense of the creation and the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{920}

\textsuperscript{917} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8}, op. cit., p. 431.
\textsuperscript{918} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8}, op. cit., p. 480.
\textsuperscript{919} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8}, op. cit., p. 372.
\textsuperscript{920} Bonhoeffer, \textit{DBWE Vol 8}, op. cit., p. 373.
Bonhoeffer also levels a similar critique at Barth’s dialectical theology. Whereas he commends Barth’s critique of religion, Bonhoeffer laments that Barth does not go far enough, and is guilty of what he refers to as a ‘positivism of revelation’. Barth’s major failing, in Bonhoeffer’s eyes, was that he offered no alternative methodology or hermeneutic to the hegemony of religious interpretation. Wüstenberg writes,

"The logical consequence of a critique of religion is to speak about God without religion. If revelatory positivism is criticizing the construction of a theory of religion, then religionlessness for Bonhoeffer means the absence of any theory of religion."

It is with this in mind that Bonhoeffer advocates his idea of ‘non-religious interpretation’, or ‘religionless Christianity’. For Bonhoeffer religion here is not primarily about followship, or even faith in Jesus Christ, but rather humanity’s futile attempt to reach beyond itself in order to find meaning, or validation, or protection; it is a form of self-justification. Bonhoeffer asserts, therefore, that to interpret in a religious sense is to speak both metaphysically on the one hand, as an attempt to make sense of the mystery of the world, and also individualistically on the other hand, as a way of justifying one’s own existence. Bethge writes,

"It appeared to Bonhoeffer that, in the long history of its metaphysical construction, the once overwhelming...

921 See also Wüstenberg, op. cit., p. 36. Barth’s understanding of religion is comparable to Paul’s understanding of the Law. "(L)aw is religion and the gospel is grace".
923 Wüstenberg, op. cit., p. 64. See also Bethge, op. cit., p. 872. "...the phenomenon of religion did not appear to Bonhoeffer to be an eternal concomitant human characteristic, but a transitory historical one, and therefore perhaps a unique ‘Western’ phenomenon that would not return."
924 Bethge, op. cit., p. 871.
925 Bethge, op. cit., p. 872.
926 See also Wüstenberg, op. cit., p. 7. Bonhoeffer believed that "(l)ndividualism is the basic error or Protestant theology."
927 Bethge, op. cit., p. 874.
transcendence of faith has been reduced to something painfully remote. Supernatural and mythological formulations obscure the Gospel’s direct immediacy, and the exotic nature of the context in which it is presented has nothing to do with the message itself… (M)etaphysics seduces the Christian religion into thinking statically in terms of two spheres, and forces it to give its redemptive nature a one-sided emphasis…. Just as Tillich wants to get rid of the ‘supernatural’ and Bultmann the ‘mythological’, Bonhoeffer, for the sake of God, wants to get rid of the ‘religious’ trappings, the objectifications of God that is conditional by a particular age.928

In his youth Bonhoeffer had been disturbed by the notion that the Christian religion had become compartmentalized in the lives of believers. His doctoral supervisor, Reinhold Seeberg called this the religious a priori – a domain for religion that exists alongside other worthy domains in an individual’s life. The Christian God then becomes a ‘god of the gaps’, condemned to presiding over a retreating domain of the mysterious or transcendent. For Bonhoeffer, however, the domain of faith is meant to be holistic; the demands of followship are uncompromising.929

Bonhoeffer continues to be concerned about religion’s tendency to transform God into a deus ex machina, and the disturbing notion that Christianity itself had been so perverted that it was becoming a religion of privilege. Bethge notes that this fear was most probably accentuated by the environment in which Bonhoeffer was writing. There was no deus ex machina to come to Bonhoeffer’s rescue. For Bethge, there are two ongoing themes that infiltrate Bonhoeffer’s writing, especially during his internment at Tegel – namely, non-

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928 Bethge, op. cit., p. 873.
929 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 482. “The religious act is always something partial; ‘faith’ is something whole, involving the whole of one’s life. Jesus calls not to a new religion but to life.”
religious interpretation in a world come of age, and religious interpretation in a world that is treated as if it were not of age.

Bethge writes,

All religion depends on this concept. There must be a supreme being (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence) so that we can be rescued from dangers, have our mysteries solved, and hear our questions answered. This makes the Christian religion a spiritual pharmacy. The preacher points out to his listeners their need of help in order, then, to dispense to them the necessary remedies. Bonhoeffer’s concern here is to show that it is precisely religiosity, even piety, that can dangerously conceal humanity’s real godlessness. Christ must not be made the ‘answer’, the ‘solution’ or the ‘medicine’. Religion depends on the power of God, but ‘the Bible directs us to God’s powerlessness and suffering’.

For Bonhoeffer this idea of non-religious interpretation was not primarily about Biblical hermeneutics, but rather, theological ethics, and this worldliness then becomes another way of talking about an incarnated existence. It is one in which we live responsibly before Christ who is already in the world, challenging the finality of crucifixion and death, with the hope of the resurrection and new life. On July 16, 1944, he writes,

Being a Christian does not mean being religious in a certain way, making oneself into something or other (a sinner, penitent, or saint) according to some method or other. Instead it means being human, not a certain type of human being, but the human being Christ creates in us. It is not a religious act that makes someone a Christian, but rather sharing in God’s suffering in the worldly life. That is ‘metanoia’ [repentance], not thinking first of one’s own needs, questions, sins, and fears but allowing oneself to be pulled into the path that Jesus walks, into the messianic event…

930 Bethge, op. cit., p. 876.
931 Bethge, op. cit., p. 880.
933 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 480.
Bonhoeffer laments the inability of religious language to express adequately the experience of faith in Christ and the call of followship, and so, in response to this, he experiments on different occasions with analogous non-religious language in order to convey his thoughts. In a letter dated May 20, 1944, Bonhoeffer draws upon his personal experience of music to engage in a discussion on the theology of personhood built upon the ancient musical principles of cantus firmus and polyphony. A cantus firmus (fixed song) is a melody to which one or more contrapuntal parts can be added. For Bonhoeffer the consistent melody line found in this form of music is akin to the love of God that should centre our lives. Other musical parts and forms may be added to the cantus firmus to create a polyphony, but it is the clarity of the melody that carries the composition. Diversity within such a musical piece is not merely tolerated, it is celebrated. The cantus firmus lays the foundation from which a polyphonic movement takes shape, exploring the nuances of musical expression and creativity. For Bonhoeffer this was analogous to his understanding of followship – a life lived in followship of Christ. Life is meant to be polyphonic, multi-dimensional, built around the cantus firmus of God’s love.

6.2.5 An Arcane Discipline

This idea of the cantus firmus of God’s love, and the polyphonic nature of life, is also analogous to the way Bonhoeffer understands the nature of the church

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934 See also Wüstenberg, op. cit., p. 123. Wüstenberg argues that ‘religionless Christianity’ is actually a Christological interpretation.
935 Wüstenberg, op. cit., p. 123.
937 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 405
and its call to be the Body of Christ in the world. The *cantus firmus* of the church’s praxis is the arcane discipline of prayer and worship that gathers around the sacraments. The polyphony of the church’s engagement with the world becomes the fervent song of the community of faith. Bonhoeffer’s terminology of nonreligious interpretation and world come of age should never be understood as an indication of an intention to abandon the great traditions of the church. On the contrary, Bonhoeffer insists on an intentioned recovery of that which should remain hidden from the world: the corporate disciplines of followship.

There is no doubt that Bonhoeffer regarded an arcane discipline as the indispensable counterpoint of nonreligious interpretation. Much to his own annoyance, he was not yet able to resolve this problem in a theologically satisfactory way. When he developed his new perspective he immediately raised the question of what was going to happen to the worship service, although not in the spirit of dismantling or even getting rid of it. On the contrary, he was concerned to preserve—as he explicitly states a ‘genuine worship’. This means that he has no intention of simply including the religionless world within the church or making the church and the world the same thing. Bonhoeffer would be completely misunderstood if the realization of his worldly interpretation were conceived to mean that there would no longer be any community gathered for worship, and that the word, sacrament, and the community could be replaced by *caritas*. In the nonreligious interpretation the church’s self-sacrifice that Bonhoeffer was thinking of, both for the church and for himself, cannot be equated at all with the loss of its identity. On the contrary, that is precisely what is to be re-won.

Bonhoeffer believed it was better for the church to remain silent about things the world would not understand rather than create propaganda for the gospel.

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938 Bonhoeffer, *LT*, op. cit.
It would be better for the concepts of prayer and worship, the sacraments and the creed, to remain mysterious and alien, than to compromise them in order to make them more acceptable to the world. Indeed, Bonhoeffer’s fear was that the mysteries of the church, the disciplines that regulate its corporate life and give shape to its spiritual well-being, could all too easily become religious constructs, a ‘positivism of revelation’, if they were offered to the world too cheaply and without the cost of accountability and responsibility.  

Religious content is not to be surrendered, but rather venerated and protected from profanation; in the place of loquacious religiosity, Bonhoeffer demands qualified silence. The glorification of the mystery of Christ’s person in prayer and worship corresponds eternally to the responsible act, so that arcane discipline finds its ‘dialectical counterpart’ in the nonreligious interpretation. In the words of the *Letters and Papers from Prison*, arcane discipline and religionlessness are related like the *prayer and actions of the righteous*. Or, to use a formulation from the *Ethics*, arcane discipleship and nonreligious interpretation are related as the ultimate and the penultimate.

For Bonhoeffer to embrace the arcane disciplines of the church was not to somehow retreat from the world. Just as worldliness refers to Christ as the real one in the world, arcane discipline refers to Christ as being the present one in the church.

Arcane discipline without worldliness is a ghetto and worldliness without arcane discipline is nothing more than a boulevard. In isolation, arcane discipline becomes liturgical monasticism, and nonreligious interpretation an intellectual game.

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941 Wüstenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
942 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics, op. cit.*, p. 198. Bonhoeffer writes, “...there is no real possibility of being a Christian outside the reality of the world and... there is no real worldly existence outside the reality of Jesus Christ. There is no place to which the Christian life can withdraw from the world, be this outwardly or in the realm of the inner life.”
6.3 Following to the End

The theology Bonhoeffer espouses in the letters from Tegel Prison should not be understood as a departure from his earlier writing, but rather as a part of the evolution of his thinking; what Bonhoeffer himself referred to as a “turning from the phraseological to the real”.\textsuperscript{944} The letters from Tegel draw on Bonhoeffer’s earlier thinking, from Sanctorum Communio and Act and Being, through to his Christological lectures at the University of Berlin, his writings on followship at Finkenwalde and, of course, Ethics.\textsuperscript{945} Even though there may be continuity in Bonhoeffer’s terminology, his thinking had changed,\textsuperscript{946} informed by his experience in the world.\textsuperscript{947} Whereas the intellectual rigor of his earlier work remained, it was tempered with the lived reality that the best thinking does not always take place in the confines of the academy, or in the solace of the church, but in the pathos of the world. For it is in the world, for others, that Bonhoeffer’s Christology, ecclesiology and ethics takes shape. In many ways, Bonhoeffer’s theology comes full circle, as he revisits his earlier academic formation within the Liberal Protestant tradition under the tutelage of Harnack and Seeberg and others. He does so from a different perspective, not intent on finding the answers to the questions of the academy, but in

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\textsuperscript{944} Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 358. Bonhoeffer is writing about the transformation that began over a decade earlier when for the first time he ‘discovered the Bible’ and learned that he ‘must follow the path’ that Christ that Christ laid before him. (See Bethge, op. cit., p. 205).
\textsuperscript{945} Bethge, op. cit., pp. 889-890.
\textsuperscript{946} See also Wüstenberg, op. cit., p. 26. Wüstenberg discusses the fact that Bonhoeffer’s understanding of ‘religion’ changes over time.
\textsuperscript{947} Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, op. cit., p. 51. “…knowledge cannot be separated from the existence in which it was acquired.”
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search of the Christ who has gone before us to prepare the way.  

His proposals for the church are indeed radical, and perhaps even naïve, but his commitment to the fellowship imperative is paramount. In a letter written to Bethge on the occasion of his son’s Baptism, Bonhoeffer writes,

…we can be Christians today in only two ways, through prayer and in doing justice among human beings. All Christian thinking, talking, and organizing must be born anew, out of that prayer and action. By the time you grow up, the form of the church will have changed considerably. It will be melted and remolded, and every attempt to help it develop prematurely into a powerful organization again will only delay its conversion and purification. It is not for us to predict the day – but the day will come – when people will once more be called to speak the word of God in such a way that the world is

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948 Mark 16:6-8. See also Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 22. “In many respects Bonhoeffer’s prison theology was an attempt to engage critically both neoorthodoxy as represented by Barth and liberal Protestantism as represented by Harnack, in an attempt to restate the meaning of Christ for today. With Barth he remains Christological in focus, convinced that Barth’s critique of religion from the perspective of the gospel remained fundamental even if it did not go far enough. But with Harnack, he took more seriously the questions raised by the Enlightenment and the challenges of modernity. Put differently, Bonhoeffer’s concern now was how to speak of the God of Jesus Christ without the need for a religious worldview that was no longer credible, and to do so mindful of the immense changes that had taken place in human endeavor over the past few centuries.” See also Selby, P “Christianity in a World Come of Age”, pp. 226-245, in de Gruchy, Companion, op. cit. Selby suggests that quotes from Letters and Papers from Prison at first appear to penned from a Liberal Christian who has abandoned the traditions of faith, but he believes the opposite is the case, Bonhoeffer is committed to the way of Christ and is immersed in the traditions of the Christian faith. “This apostle of secular Christianity turns out to be remarkably attached to its central doctrinal inheritance; this protagonist of what came to be celebrated as ‘religionless Christianity’ is clearly immersed in a tradition of piety and devotion from which he derived enormous sustenance and which echoes with the sounds of a lifetime’s spiritual formation; this determined advocate of human autonomy and secular strength is constantly searching for the way of obedience to Christ’s claim upon his life; and Bonhoeffer the disciple determined to share the fate of God who suffers at the hands of a godless world shows no sign of the disdain for life and its beauty and delight which sometimes characterizes those willing to suffer and die for their faith.”

949 Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, op. cit., p. 503. “The church is only the church when it is there for others. As a first step it must give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the freewill offerings of the congregations and perhaps be engaged in some secular vocation. The church must participate in the worldly tasks of life in the community – not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell people in every calling what a life with Christ is, what it means ‘to be there for others’. In particular, our church will have to confront the vice of hubris, the worship of power, envy and illusionism as the roots of all evil. It will have to speak of moderation, authenticity, trust, faithfulness, steadfastness, patience, discipline, humility, modesty, contentment. It will have to see that it does not underestimate the significance of the human ‘example’ (which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus and is so important in Paul’s writings!); the church’s word gains weight and power not through concepts but by example.
changed and renewed. It will be in a new language, perhaps quite nonreligious language, but liberating and redeeming like Jesus’ language, so that people will be alarmed and yet overcome by its power – the language of a new righteousness and truth, a language proclaiming that God makes peace with humankind and that God’s kingdom is drawing near.  

It is the drawing near of God’s Kingdom that urged Bonhoeffer again and again to ask the pertinent question of Christology: ‘Who is Christ for us today?’ The followship of Christ, not religion, is the call upon all who would dare to take up the call of discipleship. For Bonhoeffer this is the journey that would not only cost him his life, but also birth him eternally.

This is the end — for me the beginning of life.

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952 See also Wüstenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 13. Wüstenberg argues that for Bonhoeffer, Christianity is not a new religion that has been established but rather a piece of the world that has been created anew.
953 See also Bonhoeffer, D., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 7: Fiction from Tegel Prison (DBWE Vol. 7)*, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 2000. In a novel fragment from Tegel, Bonhoeffer writes, “So you think we must have more religion, if we want to be in responsible positions someday” – and the response is “No, I think – we have to be Christians.”
954 Bethge, *op. cit.*, p. 927. The last recorded words of Bonhoeffer as remembered by Payne Best April 9, 1945.
In Part One of our study we investigated the followship imperative intrinsic to the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. According to Jensen, Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the presence of Christ in the Church, mediated through the word and sacraments, is the hermeneutical starting point for all Christian denominations as they seek to work out their theology and Church life. And yet as we have seen, Bonhoeffer’s understanding of Christ’s presence in the Church does not preclude Christ’s presence also being seen in the world as the Incarnate One, the Crucified One and the Resurrected One.

Bonhoeffer’s Christology lectures declare that Christ is ‘the centre’ of all reality. Yet the very essence of Christ can only be understood in terms of relationality. A relationality expressed in Christ being-for-others, for history, and for the world. And because the Church is the very real presence of Christ in the world, this relationality also defines the Church: the Church is only the Church when it is there-for-others. It is this orientation of being-for-others that provides both the rationale and the impetus for our hermeneutic of followship. Being-for-others gives the Church the eyes to see Christ already present in the world as the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One. But identifying an appropriate hermeneutic for followship is only the beginning of our project. We now have to develop a methodology through which our hermeneutic key

is turned, in order to unlock a way forward for those who would dare to follow the way of Christ.

For Bonhoeffer, the hermeneutic of the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One, provides an entry point to the narrative of followship that is enacted in the world. Followship is not merely a theory or a doctrine, it is the lived experience of disciples ‘on the Way’ with Jesus: it is the story of God in the world. Over the next three chapters we will investigate this notion of story, and discover that we live in a world of stories, and the stories we tell, eventually tell us.

We shall further our study by examining the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and his theories on how languages works. Wittgenstein turns the study of language on its head, by suggesting that ‘grammar’ is a theological concept: the meanings of words are identified in their usage, as is the language we use for God. Bonhoeffer’s desire for a new language for the Christian faith in a ‘world come of age’ combined with Wittgenstein’s understanding of such notions as ‘language games’ and ‘picture thinking’ prepare us for our more in depth study of narrative.

We will then focus our investigation into stories themselves: What is a story? How does it work? What is its power? We will discover that the followship imperative exists within story-form in the narratives of the New Testament, and that it is a living story that invites our participation. We will

956 Elements of Chapter Seven were included in an article published online by the author in 2012. Sourced online http://trinity.qld.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/UTC_Essay07.pdf
957 Elements of Chapter Eight were included in the author’s Honour’s thesis: The Hermeneutics of Followship: The Call of Christ Reframed, submitted to United Theological College in 2004.
also make some observations about the process of story telling itself, how formative narratives are enacted in our lives.

We will conclude Part Two of our study with an examination into the way stories tell us into the future we are yet to live.\textsuperscript{958} We will explore the implications that the stories we tell have for our understanding of ethics and eschatology as an outworking of the followship imperative.

In Part Three of our study, we will briefly examine what the followship imperative looks like in an Australian context.

\textsuperscript{958} Elements of Chapter Nine were included in the author's Honour's thesis: \textit{The Hermeneutics of Followship: The Call of Christ Reframed}, submitted to United Theological College in 2004.
Chapter Seven:

The Grammar of Followship

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.959

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.960

The study of language is a theological discipline because it is an ontological one.961 Indeed, according to the narrative of Genesis Chapter 1, it is language that births creation as an instrument of the Divine.962 Thus, within the Biblical narrative, language exists before creation and has shaped the world in which we live. According to John 1, there is also something about language itself that is divine. The Word is God,963 and has joined with

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960 John 1:1.
961 Derrida, J., Of Grammatology, John Hopkins University Press, London, 1974. p. 14. Derrida claims that language and theology have the same origins. See also Cupitt, D., What is Story?, SCM Press, London, 1991, p. 6. (Referred to as WS from here on). Sentences shape reality. In many languages the same word for sentence (a string of words grammatically ordered) also means moral or legal judgment (eg Hebrew: תָּכָּנָה davar). “In a double sense words order: they both arrange and ordain.” See also Wittgenstein, L., Philosophical Investigations, Blackwell, Oxford, 1973. no. 371, (Referred to as PI from here on). “Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)” Also Hudson, D., Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Bearing of his Philosophy upon Religious Belief, Lutterworth Press, London, 1968, p. 64. “Ontological statements are logically meaningless. ‘To say God is love,’ if it is true, is to say that ‘Love is love’, which is meaningless – if it isn’t true, then it means that ‘not love, is not love’, which is also meaningless. Thus the audacity of theology is that it is totally based on an epistemological foundation that is essentially and necessarily illogical!!”
962 Genesis 1:3. And God said, “Let there be light.” See also Cupitt, WS, op. cit., p. 53. “The creation myth didn’t just describe creation; in being enacted, it was itself the creating of the world.”
963 John 1:1.
It seems that language itself is essential to the incarnation of God, the Word become flesh, even as it is also the process through which incarnation takes place. Language then, is also essential to what it means to be human. God becomes one of us as the Word becomes flesh; and Adam and Eve are spoken into creation through the utterance of the divine. Without language we do not exist.

We see and understand things the way that we do because of the interlocutor of language that is both the creator and interpreter of our lived experience. Our adherence to the rules of syntax, the content of our vocabulary, and the grammatical structure of our speech and writing, identify and give meaning to our notions of truth and being, existence and time, faith and doubt, fear and longing, memory and hope. Put simply, the languages we use and the stories we tell – tell us.

To be a follower of Christ is to be part of a story that seeks to re-create the world. Whether it be the poetic prelude of John 1’s ontological imagination that locates the Divine Logos before the very foundations of the universe, speaking it into existence, or the defiant silence of the Truly Human One who stands before the tyranny of Empire and refuses to speak – the Good News of God’s comes to us through the vehicle of language. To be sure, as sensory beings, there are undoubtedly an infinite number of ways in which we may experience an encounter with the Divine, but it is language that

964 John 1:14.
966 Cupitt, D., Life Lines, SCM Press, London, 1986, p. 189. (referred to as LL from here on). “Language does not trace an objective world-structure; rather, the nature of the world is given with, and indeed is identical with, the nature of language. The world is in language, not language in the world.”
967 Matthew 27:14; Mark 15:5.
articulates our experience, and it is story that shapes and directs our language. Language and story transact our experience into meaning.

In examining the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Part One of our study, we discerned the importance of language in how we talk about God. Bonhoeffer’s desire to introduce a schema for a ‘religion-less Christianity’ lies, in some part at least, with what he perceived as the inadequacy of language itself. Bonhoeffer tried to discover ways to get around this inadequacy by introducing new terminology to the existing theological vocabulary, and revisiting ‘old language’ with new meanings.\footnote{968 de Lange, op. cit., See in particular pp. 1-13.} In the end, however, it is the way Bonhoeffer sought to develop a new grammar for theology that has probably had the greatest impact on our understanding of fellowship. In other words, Bonhoeffer’s desire to circumvent the insular language system of the institutionalized and encultured German Church incorporated both a revisioning of the words we use about God, and also the way we use them.

But Bonhoeffer was not the only one in Germany in the 1930’s seeking to revolutionize the way we speak about God: Hitler’s rhetoric was also full of ecclesial imagery and theological metaphor.\footnote{969 Bucher, op. cit., p. 13. Bucher describes Hitler’s rhetoric as one that relied heavily on a form of bastardized or caricatured religious-nationalistic discourse of his own making.} As previously discussed in Part One, the three ‘theological publics’ of the church, the academy and the wider society, each require a slightly different ‘language’ of faith, and Bonhoeffer found the ideological distances between each ‘public’ was increasing at a rapid rate. And so, theological discourse in pre World War Two Germany was a contested space, and the stakes were high. The role of
theological language in public discourse, and the very place of the church in public life were being called into question and re-imagined along very different lines. For Hitler, the church provided the ideological and grammatical scaffolding from which to launch his National Socialist project. For Bonhoeffer, the theological language and the ecclesial structures of the church had been crucified in the market place of nationalism and liberalism and were in desperate need of resurrection.

At the same time that Bonhoeffer and Hitler were seeking to redefine public theological discourse in Germany, the very logic of language itself was being reconsidered in the School of Philosophy at Cambridge University. If language is the medium through which we interpret and understand the world, how are we to interpret and understand language itself? When Bonhoeffer talks about the primacy of obedience and fidelity and deputyship, and Hitler proclaims himself Führer (Leader), it is obvious that the study of the way language is used and understood becomes of critical importance. The critical figure in this area of enquiry is Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein not only challenges our understanding of how language works, but also how ideas such as faith and hope and truth can transact meaning in our lives. As we shall see, Wittgenstein’s project will have significant implications for our understanding of the followship imperative.

970 Bucher, op. cit., p. 59. Not only was Hitler’s rhetoric laced with theological language and metaphor, but he also often concluded his rally speeches with prayer.
971 Bucher, op. cit., p. xv “All significant concepts of Hitler’s modern theory of the ‘state’ are secularized and bastardized ecclesiological concepts.”
7.1 The theology of Grammar / the Grammar of Theology

When we ask the great existential questions of human enquiry – ‘What is truth?’, ‘Why am I here?’, ‘What is the meaning of life?’ – we need to understand that these very questions are contained within language. There is no philosophy or theology without language; indeed there are no questions without language.

Classical philosophical investigations of language have tended to concentrate their field of study around the relationship between words and things. Philosophers interested in the study of language and meaning, ask the following types of questions, ‘How do we understand the relationship between words and things; is one determinative of the other?’ ‘How do we mediate meaning through language?’ ‘What is the relationship between word and thought; between thought and thing?’ ‘What is the process that connects thought, word and thing?’ There are also obvious implications here for theological enquiry. How do we use words to speak of the Word?; ‘How is God’s Word different from human words?; ‘Is God’s revelation in Christ Jesus, beyond the normalcy of language theory, or bounded by it?’

When we use a word to define a thing we participate in a process that is at once artificial and arbitrary, and yet at the same time determinative. In many respects, the word ‘becomes’ the thing for the purposes of cognition and communication, even though the word is also never the thing, for the word is a signifier, a linguistic creation, and never the entity it represents. For example, when we think of a typical chair (four legs, a seat and a back rest), we have in

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972 Staten, op. cit., p. 5.
mind an ideal chair, one that represents all chairs, and yet at the same time one that represents a chair that can never actually exist. The word ‘chair’ acts as the signifier of the idea of the chair, rather than the chair itself, for a real chair can never actually exist in a person’s mind.

So, when we recall/imagine/discuss/contemplate a thing, we are only ever recalling/imagining/discussing/contemplating the idea and not the thing itself. The word we use has no sphere of influence over the thing itself, but is instead symbiotically connected to the idea of the thing and the process through which meaning is transacted.

Because of this relationship between word and idea and thing, the boundaries of our language become epistemological boundaries which, in turn, become boundaries of meaning. Within the framework of a classical philosophical approach, the gateway from word to thing, from idea to meaning, can be found in relation to the third-person-present-indicative of the verb ‘to be’ – the word ‘is’. When we dare to proclaim that ‘this’ is ‘that’ we make a gigantic epistemological leap that both defines and defies our ways of knowing. The word ‘is’ defines for us the boundaries of both word and meaning in relation to the thing: to associate a particular word with a particular meaning limits the usage and identity of both the word and the meaning (to say ‘this is a chair’ also means that ‘this is not an albatross’). But the word ‘is’ also defies our knowing, because we mistakenly assume that we are dealing with the thing when we are not – we are dealing with the word and the idea or meaning.

The word we speak is not what we speak of – and yet it becomes as such to us through the power of language. Through the word ‘is’, the idea or meaning
becomes a type of presence and gives accessibility to the knower of the known. 973

The relationship between word and meaning is hotly contested, the epistemological implications substantial. Because our systems of knowing are intrinsic to the functionality of language, the study of language is elemental to epistemology. The process of how we know things, or if we can actually know things, is also of vital importance to the disciplines of ethics and theology. One of the most profound thinkers in the last 100 years to have studied the onto-phenomenon of language has done so, however, by taking a marked detour from the more traditional/classical approach cited above. 974 Ludwig Wittgenstein challenges and confronts our understanding of language and epistemology, by insisting that language does not work because it follows a set of rules or philosophical propositions. Wittgenstein utilizes instead the term grammar in a somewhat idiosyncratic manner. Rather than being confined and constrained as some sort of regulatory schema of syntactic and semantic theory, grammar becomes a relational and fluid network concerned with what makes sense and how something is known. Of course, reflection on language occurs within language and, by the simple use of syntax and grammar (for example – quotation marks), language can become of the object

973 Staten, op. cit., p. 10.
974 Wittgenstein, Tractatus op. cit. Wittgenstein seeks to define the ‘logic of language’ and at first read seems to stand firmly with the empiricist philosophical tradition. But I believe that even in his earlier work there are traces of his later thinking that then undergo a metamorphosis rather than a radical departure – akin to the transformation that has taken place between modern and post-modern thought. (First the caterpillar – then the butterfly!). Within Tractatus, Wittgenstein reasons that different ways of knowing tell us ‘how’ we know rather than ‘what’ we know (for eg. Wittgenstein, Tractatus, op. cit., no. 6.342. “Similarly the possibility of describing the world by means of Newtonian mechanics tells us nothing about the world: but what does tell us something about it is the precise way in which it is possible to describe it by these means”.)
of its own investigation. Grammar is the canvas on which everything that is knowable begins and ends.

Essence is expressed by grammar ... Grammar tells what kind of object anything is (Theology as grammar).

Wittgenstein believes that grammar enacts meaning and does so in everyday conversation. The way words are used in sentences conveys meaning beyond the words themselves. Language often deceives us, and philosophy has all too often followed after elusive rabbits only to find that the burrow goes nowhere (or loops back to where we started).

I can know what someone else is thinking, not what I am thinking. It is correct to say ‘I know what you are thinking’, and wrong to say ‘I know what I am thinking.’ (A whole cloud of philosophy condensed into a drop of grammar.)

For Wittgenstein it is in the interplay of what he refers to as language games, that meaning is found (or perhaps where meaning finds us?).

7.2 (De)constructing Language Games

Wittgenstein’s seminal works Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1922) and Philosophical Investigations (1953) stand as two giant bookends along the

975 Staten, op. cit., p. 88.
976 Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 371. See also Hudson, op. cit., 55. Hudson talks about the difference between surface grammar and depth grammar. To say ‘this apple is red’ is a different order of statement then to say “God is love”.
977 Ricoeur, P., The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language, Routledge, Classics, London, 2003. p. 89-90. Ricoeur insists that the meaning of a sentence is not the result of the meaning of its words, rather it is the words that gain their meaning from the sentence. See also Cupitt, WS, op. cit., p. 6. Sentences shape reality. In many languages the same word for sentence (a sting of words grammatically ordered) also means moral or legal judgement (actform). “In a double sense words order: they both arrange and ordain.”
978 Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 222.
great spectrum of modernist (*Tractatus*) and post-modern (*PI*) thought. His writings have polarized the academic community and he has many loyal followers belonging to opposing schools of philosophical study. Because of this legacy, critics have often accused Wittgenstein’s work of being contradictory and obscurantist. It is more likely the case that this ambivalent legacy is simply a reflection of Wittgenstein’s lived experience. The lived contradictions in his life undoubtedly helped to shape Wittgenstein’s thinking.

Wittgenstein’s first major work, *Tractatus*, attempts to solve the problems of philosophy with the application of logic. Wittgenstein proceeds to develop his argument through seven major propositions, beginning with, “The world is all that is the case”, and concluding, somewhat surprisingly with, “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence”. Through *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein initially believes that he has found a solution to all the major

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979 The Vienna Circle (1922) gathered around Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and considered itself both empiricist and positivist in its philosophical approach (Logical Positivism), whereas in Cambridge, it was his *Philosophical Investigations* that had a lasting impact.

980 Wittgenstein inherited great wealth and yet he gave it all away. He began his studies as an aeronautical engineer, mathematician and logician, and yet made most of his enduring contributions in the fields of language studies, philosophy and ethics. He was born a Jew, baptized as a Roman Catholic and yet indicated strong leanings towards Protestantism. Wittgenstein seemed to have a ‘conversion’ experience to Christianity after reading Tolstoy’s, *The Gospel in Brief*, but he never joined a church community, or publicly professed his faith in any substantial way. See also McClendon, J. W., *Witness: Systematic theology Vol 3*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2000, p. 236-240. (Referred to as *Witness* from here on). After he published *Tractatus* and was hailed as a genius by his mentor Bertrand Russell, he left the academy and worked as a gardener and then primary school teacher in rural Austria. Morality and Religion were very important to him, and yet he despised his own homosexuality and met with lovers in secret (Wittgenstein’s sexual orientation is contested among his biographers. All would agree, however, that he was a loner who seemed to crave ‘deep’ relationships and yet found solace in solitude). He lived a somewhat Spartan lifestyle and yet dedicated two years of his life designing an opulent mansion for his sister. He contemplated suicide on more than one occasion (three of his brothers ended their own lives) and yet the last words from his deathbed refer to the wonderful life he had lived. See also Fowler, W. J. and Lovin R. W. (ed), *Trajectories in Faith: Five Life Stories*, Nashville, Abingdon, 1980. pp. 119 – 145.

problems of philosophy and that there is nothing more to be said. *Tractatus*

itself holds the key to its own unraveling, however.

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)

So, Wittgenstein uses the logic of language to tie itself in knots and then become its own undoing. It is not that the logic of language is unimportant or irrelevant; on the contrary, Wittgenstein is methodical and dogmatic in his pursuit of logic.

Rather, Wittgenstein believed that many of the propositions and questions of philosophy arise from a general failure to understand the logic of language. He was convinced that the essential problems that arise (or fall) in philosophy are not in fact problems at all, but misunderstandings. The goal of philosophy, then, is not so much the pursuit of wisdom, but rather to address the confusion surrounding the questions being asked (and indeed to begin to ask the right questions!). We can see even here the germination of his later thinking in relation to his theories on language games.

At the heart of this misunderstanding in relation to philosophy and logic is the way philosophy approaches ethics. Wittgenstein believed *Tractatus* to be primarily about ethics, precisely because this is what the book does not

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984 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus, op. cit.*, no. 6.54.
985 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus, op. cit.*, no. 4.003. See also a letter Wittgenstein wrote to Russell "Now I'm afraid you haven't really got hold of my main contention to which the whole business of logical propositions is only corollary. The main point is the theory of what can be expressed by propositions, i.e., by language (and, which comes to the same thing, what can be thought) and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown: which I believe is the cardinal problem of philosophy." Cited in Edwards, J. C., *Ethics Without Philosophy: Wittgenstein and the Moral Life*, University Presses of Florida, 1982.
discuss. By pulling the rug out from underneath the very logical-positivist approach he undertakes, Wittgenstein leaves open the possibility of a ‘greater knowing’ that exists outside of language and systems of logic. In a now-famous letter to Ludwig von Ficker, the publisher of Tractatus, Wittgenstein wrote:

(T)he point of the book is ethical. I once wanted to give a few words in the foreword which now actually are not in it, which, however, I'll write to you now because they might be a key for you: I wanted to write that my work consists of two parts: of the one which is here, and of everything which I have not written. And precisely this second part is the important one. For the Ethical is delimited from within, as it were, by my book; and I’m convinced, strictly speaking, it can ONLY be delimited in this way. In brief, I think: All of that which many are babbling today, I have defined in my book by remaining silent about it.  

If Wittgenstein ‘pulls the rug out’ with his Tractatus, he lays down an entirely new floor covering with Philosophical Investigations. PI begins with a quote from Augustine’s Confessions (1.8) about the nature of language and how it works:

as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires.

Wittgenstein then continues,

These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in language name objects--sentences are combinations of such names. In this picture of language we find the roots of the following

987 Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 1. At first glance, this quote from Augustine seems very reminiscent of the schema utilised in Tractatus (ie a referential system of language and meaning). See also Hudson, op. cit., p. 9. As I have already indicated, the salient point of Tractatus, so often misunderstood by a surface reading, is that this methodology is defeated by its own logic.
idea: Every word has a meaning. The meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.\textsuperscript{988}

This introductory commentary on the \textit{Confessions}, however, is not an assent to Augustine's thinking, but rather the beginning of a deconstruction of Augustine's thesis. Throughout the rest of \textit{Pl}, Wittgenstein postulates that the reduction of language to a model of representation and repetition is oversimplistic and benign: it ignores the depth of grammar and meaning that language both creates and to which it responds. His investigation is unconventional, occasional, conversational and sometimes circular as he uses language to interrogate itself.\textsuperscript{989}

Wittgenstein insists that language is embedded in the form of life in which it occurs and apart from which it cannot be understood.\textsuperscript{990} Military commands, journalist reports, songs/poems, jokes etc cannot be understood properly when removed from the context (form of life) from which they originate and are used.

The key concept here for Wittgenstein is use:

\begin{quote}
For a large class of cases—though not for all-in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language. And the meaning of a name is sometimes explained by pointing to its bearer.\textsuperscript{991}
\end{quote}

Wittgenstein is not simply saying 'meaning is use', but rather that the definition of the word 'meaning' should be understood this way: the word

\textsuperscript{988} Wittgenstein, \textit{Pl}, op. cit., no. 2.
\textsuperscript{989} Fowler and Lovin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 141. In Philosophical Investigations there are 784 questions, 110 are answered and of these 70 of the answers given are intended to be the wrong answers.
\textsuperscript{990} Wittgenstein, \textit{Pl}, op. cit., no. 19. "(T)o imagine a language means to imagine a form of life".
\textsuperscript{991} Wittgenstein, \textit{Pl}, op. cit., no. 43.
'meaning' and meaning are two different things. In fact Wittgenstein would find the notion of meaning, as such, (apart from the word) inconceivable. Wittgenstein is concerned that we mistakenly think of a word and its meaning as two different things – for example, “like a cow and the money used to pay for it.” For Wittgenstein the word ‘meaning’ is simply one word among others. What is more pertinent to our discussion, then, is how language is used. Language is not just merely spoken, or for that matter written down, it is enacted, embodied. Language is not mastered in an inner-world of cognitive processes, but in an exterior world of rehearsal and performance: not so much about theory but therapy.

This exterior world of language is governed by rules, rather than theories: those rules that can be either adhered to, or broken, within the language game that is being played. If the language game is a joke, only those who are familiar with the language game will ‘get’ the joke that has been told. Those who ‘get’ the joke will then respond accordingly – either by laughing, or perhaps even signaling their disapproval. But a response to the joke is not in and of itself a sign of participation within the same language game. For there is still a distinct difference between not ‘getting a joke’ and ‘getting a joke’ and not thinking it is funny.

992 Staten, op. cit., p. 87.
993 Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 120.
994 Staten, op. cit., p. 67. Alongside of this notion of 'language as performance' Staten also claims that for Wittgenstein, “the scene of language is the locus of meaning”. Other thinkers may use terminology such as ‘context’, but for Wittgenstein the philosophical argument is a ‘drama’ that must be acted out.
995 Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 133. “It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard of ways. For the clarity we are aiming at is indeed complete clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear... There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed different methods, like different therapies.”
Wittgenstein also explores the difference between knowing and understanding.\textsuperscript{996} Wittgenstein asks questions like, “When does a person ‘know’ the alphabet? Is it simply when they can repeat it? Is ‘knowing’ the same as repetition? Is ‘understanding’ a mental process, or is it more than that? Wittgenstein reframes the context of the enquiry (because, being contained within particular language games, the words ‘knowing’ and ‘understanding’ are often only used in certain ways). Wittgenstein suggests that knowing how to go on is a sign of being able to master a particular language game.\textsuperscript{997}

The connections here with Bonhoeffer’s understanding of ethics are quite profound. Wittgenstein’s remarks in relation to ‘going on’ have much in common with Bonhoeffer’s idea of ethical performance. Just as ‘knowing’ the alphabet is more than simply repeating a sequence, so too ‘knowing’ how to follow the Way of Christ is more than following a set of rules or merely repeating what has happened in the past. Connections such as this are not superficial or incidental, but reveal a methodological harmony. Bonhoeffer and Wittgenstein both utilise the same understanding of ‘rule following’. As such, the internal structure (grammar) of their methodology is consistent, even though their approaches and findings belong to different disciplines.

Wittgenstein uses examples of different number sequences to demonstrate his argument. It is one thing to ask a person to determine the mathematical formula being used in a particular sequence, it is another to ask, ‘what comes next?’ Just because someone follows a sequence it does not mean they


\textsuperscript{997} Wittgenstein, \textit{PI}, op. cit., no. 154.
understand it, and the converse is also true – a person can understand a sequence and make a mistake, or simply refuse to comply, and thus not follow a sequence as expected. Or, as Wittgenstein beautifully illustrates, one person’s derivation of a formula may differ from another person’s derivation – and who is to say that they are both not correct. The example he gives is of an instructor teaching a student how to continue a mathematical sequence.

The instructor gives the following numerical pattern to the student, “2, 4, 6, 8”, and asks the student to continue “in the same way”. The student continues “10, 12, 14, 16”, and the instructor seems satisfied that the student ‘understands’, until upon reaching 1000, the student says, “1004, 1008, 1012 ...”. The baffled instructor cries out, “But why are you going on now in a different way?” The incredulous student replies “But I’m not going on in a different way, I’m going on in the same way.” The instructor continues, “But can’t you see that after 1000 the correct number is 1002, and not ‘1004’?” The student is not convinced...

In this example, the instructor insists that the student was asked to continue “in the same way” from 2, 4, 6, 8, through to beyond 1000, and the student challenges the teacher’s interpretation of what “in the same way” means. For the student it means to add 2 at every step until 1000, and then to continue by adding 4 at every step. It does not have to be that the student is unintelligent or simply obstinate, (or even wrong!); rather it could simply be that the student and the instructor are playing different versions of the same game.

But of course, not every sequence follows a recognizable formula. Here we find Wittgenstein delving into the area of belief. It is one thing to believe that a chair will support your weight; it is another entirely to ‘hold fast to your beliefs’

998 Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 185.
in opposition to external pressure. For Wittgenstein, believing is not thinking, but he means this in terms of grammar rather than substance. In other words belief operates differently to knowledge (as does hope). Believing takes effort, engagement. Belief (in a religious sense) is deliberate, intentional, an act of the will, whereas knowledge (as opposed to knowing) can be incidental and accidental and occasional.

At first glance, PI seems scant in its dealings with theology and religion, because for Wittgenstein, these pursuits lay outside the limitations of language itself. In a lecture on ethics Wittgenstein declared that

Our words used as we use them in science, are vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, natural meaning and sense. Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water and if I were to pour out a gallon over it... My whole tendency and, I believe, the tendency of all men (sic) who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless.

‘Running against the walls of our cage’ is precisely where Wittgenstein leads his readers in PI. “Don’t think, but look!” he insists, language games are all around us. Talk of ethics and religion and God constitute a language game that seems mere nonsense to those who are not part of it. It is not that such talk is unreasonable, but rather that the very essence of religious language is

999 Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 475.
1000 Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 474.
1001 A popular lecture believed to be delivered in Cambridge to the society known as “The Heretics” (1929 or 1930). Sourced online http://www.scribd.com/doc/2640412/Wittgenstein-Lecture-on-Ethics
1002 Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 66.
outside the realm of reason.\textsuperscript{1003} Wittgenstein suggests that because a fairy-tale may invent that which is not the case, it does not mean that it talks nonsense.\textsuperscript{1004} It may indeed make perfect sense within the confines of its own language game.

Suppose someone were a believer and said: “I believe in a Last Judgment,” and I said; “Well, I’m not so sure. Possibly”. You would say that there is an enormous gulf between us. If he said “There is a German aeroplane overhead”, and I said " Possibly I’m not so sure” you’d say we were fairly near.\textsuperscript{1005}

Wittgenstein challenges the idea that there is only one way of knowing. Even when people agree to play the same game (eg continuing a mathematical sequence) they may not necessarily be agreeing to the same thing. Confusion, then, can often occur when two people are having a conversation about a perceived topic, and yet are playing two different language games. For example if I was to say, ‘let’s have a game of football’, this in itself would refer to a very different game if I lived in Liverpool in the UK, or Liverpool in Western Sydney (or Auckland NZ, Geelong Vic, Philadelphia USA). How much more so when we talk of God? If one person says “I believe in God,” and another says “I don’t believe in God,” they are not speaking in opposition

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1003] Wittgenstein L., (edited by Barrett, C.), "Lectures on Religious Beliefs", in Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1966, pp. 57-58. (Referred to as Beliefs from here on). Wittgenstein maintains that although religious believers are not reasonable they are also not unreasonable. He says: “They base things on evidence which taken in one way would be exceedingly flimsy. They base enormous things on this evidence. Am I to say they are unreasonable? I wouldn’t call them unreasonable. I would say, they are certainly not reasonable, that’s obvious. ‘Unreasonable’ implies, with everyone, rebuke. I want to say: they don’t treat this as a matter of reasonability. Anyone who reads the Epistles will find it said: not only that it is not reasonable, but that it is folly. Not only is it not reasonable, but it doesn’t pretend to be.” It appears that for Wittgenstein ‘unreasonable’ is the opposite of ‘reasonable’ as these words pertain to a language game based on ‘reason’. ‘Not reasonable’ simply refers to a ‘way of knowing’ that stands outside of ‘reason’s’ game. It is therefore not the opposite of ‘reason’ – just different.
\item[1005] Wittgenstein, \textit{Beliefs}, op. cit., p. 54.
\end{footnotes}
to one another, but are simply playing different language games.\footnote{See in particular Wittgenstein, \textit{Beliefs, op. cit.}, pp. 53-72. See also Hudson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24. Wittgenstein claims in \textit{Tractatus} that if a proposition is significant then so is its negation. This means, however, that a statement such as “this dog exists” is meaningless. (Because the negation “this dog does not exist” means that a ‘non-existent’ dog does not exist – in other words for the statement to be true it isn’t actually referring to anything). See also p. 53, when someone says “I believe in God,” and someone else says “I do not.” It does not mean they believe the opposite. Rather what the believer means by the terms ‘believe’ and ‘God’ are necessarily and essentially different from the non-believer. They are operating within different language games and are utilising different ‘pictures’ to re-present their thinking (see the example of the Duck-Rabbit below). To see the rabbit or the duck – you must have a prior ‘experience’ or knowledge of ‘rabbit’ or ‘duck’ otherwise they cannot be seen. To believe in God – there must be some sort of ‘God language-game’ to engage with.} And even within a particular faith tradition, especially one as ancient as Christianity, with all its nuances of evolving theology and claims to divine revelation, there can often be internal confusion as to what language game is actually being played. For example, when someone constructs some sort of proof of the resurrection, or when another looks for evidence of intelligent design in creation, they embark on a very different type of language game to the ones that give birth to the scriptures themselves.\footnote{Hudson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 68. Theism presupposes God. It cannot prove or disprove God – only engage in a language game that presupposes God.}

Wittgenstein also acknowledges that language games can be very similar to one another and yet not be the same (for example Rugby Union and Rugby League, or Presbyterianism and Methodism). He refers to these as family resemblances.\footnote{Wittgenstein, \textit{PI, op. cit.}, no. 67.} And, as with games, people need to be trained in the way they learn a particular form of language.\footnote{Wittgenstein, \textit{PI, op. cit.}, no. 27, 28.} Or, better still, Wittgenstein argues that the language we use actually trains us, its users. We are born into a system of language and use this in order to find meaning in the world.

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\footnote{1006 See in particular Wittgenstein, \textit{Beliefs, op. cit.}, pp. 53-72. See also Hudson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24. Wittgenstein claims in \textit{Tractatus} that if a proposition is significant then so is its negation. This means, however, that a statement such as “this dog exists” is meaningless. (Because the negation “this dog does not exist” means that a ‘non-existent’ dog does not exist – in other words for the statement to be true it isn’t actually referring to anything). See also p. 53, when someone says “I believe in God,” and someone else says “I do not.” It does not mean they believe the opposite. Rather what the believer means by the terms ‘believe’ and ‘God’ are necessarily and essentially different from the non-believer. They are operating within different language games and are utilising different ‘pictures’ to re-present their thinking (see the example of the Duck-Rabbit below). To see the rabbit or the duck – you must have a prior ‘experience’ or knowledge of ‘rabbit’ or ‘duck’ otherwise they cannot be seen. To believe in God – there must be some sort of ‘God language-game’ to engage with.}{\textit{Beliefs, op. cit.}} pp. 53-72. See also Hudson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24. Wittgenstein claims in \textit{Tractatus} that if a proposition is significant then so is its negation. This means, however, that a statement such as “this dog exists” is meaningless. (Because the negation “this dog does not exist” means that a ‘non-existent’ dog does not exist – in other words for the statement to be true it isn’t actually referring to anything). See also p. 53, when someone says “I believe in God,” and someone else says “I do not.” It does not mean they believe the opposite. Rather what the believer means by the terms ‘believe’ and ‘God’ are necessarily and essentially different from the non-believer. They are operating within different language games and are utilising different ‘pictures’ to re-present their thinking (see the example of the Duck-Rabbit below). To see the rabbit or the duck – you must have a prior ‘experience’ or knowledge of ‘rabbit’ or ‘duck’ otherwise they cannot be seen. To believe in God – there must be some sort of ‘God language-game’ to engage with.
7.3 Picture Thinking and Faith Talk

For people who belong to the language game of religious faith the question remains, “If language is limited by the world, how do we speak of God who is beyond the world.” In a poignant analogy of the dilemma of language for Christian theologians, Wittgenstein unmasks our God-talk by simply stating the obvious, “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him.” Apart from having a vocabulary beyond our own, why would we dare to presume that the syntax and grammar of a lion would be anything that we could relate to? We have no family resemblance whatsoever with a lion; what is the resemblance that we consider we have with God? With this in mind, surely we are in danger of both hubris and hysteria whenever we dare to claim that we might actually understand God.

It is at this point that Wittgenstein’s development of picture thinking becomes germane to our discussion. Wittgenstein read of an account of a trial lawyer who used a miniature model of a traffic accident in a court of law to represent to the jurors what had happened. It occurred to Wittgenstein that the model functioned as a proposition of what happened in the accident, and that the reverse could also be true: that propositions could be understood as models or pictures of the world. In this way, propositions relating to abstract or invisible concepts such as peace, or love, or God, also rely on the

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1010 Hudson, op. cit., p. 27. See also p. 66. Language about God will always be confined and constricted by the limitations of language. To say “God can do the logically impossible,” is contradictory in terms of the sentence’s internal logic and syntax. But in the end this is a comment on the language game that constitutes the sentence rather than a comment about God.


1013 Wittgenstein, Tractatus, op. cit., no. 4.01. A proposition is a picture of reality.
projection of pictures or models that somehow relate to the reality being discussed. In the case of the traffic accident, there was a direct correlation between the models used and the reality that was represented: this is that. In the case of abstract concepts, where propositions (and by inference, models or pictures that are unseen) are utilised, direct correlation is not achievable, because there is no consistency in the images projected. Instead, meaning here is determined by the way the pictures of these concepts are used in language.\textsuperscript{1014}

Wittgenstein’s picture thinking developed further in the \textit{Philosophical Investigations} where he introduces the concept of ‘seeing as’.\textsuperscript{1015} Wittgenstein uses the picture of a duck-rabbit. This simple line drawing (see figure 1) can be either seen as a duck or a rabbit, but not both at the same time. If the person viewing the picture is not aware of what a duck looks like, they will only see a rabbit, and vice versa. If the person viewing the picture is aware of what both a duck and a rabbit look like, they still may not be aware of the picture’s potential ambiguity, until it is pointed out to them. Once they are aware, they may alternate how they see the picture, between a duck and a rabbit, but they cannot see both at the same time. When a viewer alternates what they see, (between a duck and a rabbit) the picture is not changing in a material way; they actually see it differently. Wittgenstein

\textsuperscript{1014} Staten, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 73. “Wittgenstein’s argument is that a picture – even a mental picture – cannot determine its own meaning but that its meaning will be determined by its use or application, its insertion into a certain sequence. Inserted into \textit{this} sequence, the sample will be a sample of one thing, inserted into \textit{that}, of another.” (Emphasis in original).

\textsuperscript{1015} Wittgenstein, \textit{PI}, \textit{op. cit.}, pt2 p. xi.
insists, however, that the change appears to be external to the observer, as opposed to a change of interpretation. In doing so, he draws a fine line between ‘seeing as’ and interpretation.\textsuperscript{1016} For Wittgenstein, interpretation is a cognitive process that is intentional and informed and takes place over time; ‘seeing as’ is premised on the experience of seeing, and happens instantaneously. Viewers do not interpret the image of a duck or a rabbit; they simply see it. Even as the viewer alternates seeing the duck and the rabbit, the switch from one image to the other is instantaneous. Wittgenstein’s picture theory has some insightful contributions to make in terms of the way we understand God-talk.

There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.\textsuperscript{1017}

Wittgenstein believed that people who hold to religious beliefs do so not on the basis of evidence or reason; rather, they hold to a radically different picture of how the world operates. And this picture becomes a filter or lens through which the world is both interpreted and indeed re-created for religious believers. This picture of the world is so powerful that it can become life changing.\textsuperscript{1018} It is not the process of interpretation that operates differently for

\textsuperscript{1016} Compare with Heidegger, \textit{op. cit.}, p.189. “Any mere pre-predicative seeing of the ready-to-hand is, in itself, something which already understands and interprets.”

\textsuperscript{1017} Wittgenstein, \textit{Tractatus, op. cit.}, no. 6.5222. See also Hudson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 52. Hudson talks about how picture thinking is used in relation to God-talk. The statement: “God’s eye is watching you...” produces a picture... the question “Does God have bushy eyebrows?” assumes a particular type of picture thinking... the question “Is God’s eye sharp enough to count the hairs on my head?” assumes another...”

\textsuperscript{1018} See McClendon, J. W., \textit{Doctrine: Systematic Theology Vol 2}, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994, p. 77. (Referred to as \textit{Doctrine from here on.}) “Wittgenstein said that such a picture, once it is grasped, is “enough to make me change my whole life”. See also Hudson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 58. Hudson talks at length about Wittgenstein’s notion of \textit{theology as grammar}. “To be a religious believer, whatever else it may mean, is to participate in a language game or universe of discourse.” There is a difference between being a religious person and a theologian. To understand the grammatical structure of the sentence, “This book is a good present”, is a lot different to reading the book and enjoying it. See also Fowler, and Lovin, \textit{op.
people of faith, but rather that they see a different picture through which subsequent interpretation takes place. Religious conviction does not come from an ‘internal’ process of comparing the benefits of different belief systems or epistemological paradigms; rather it is seeing the picture of the external world (the duck or the rabbit) that creates the means of interpretation and orientation in the world. In this same way, Wittgenstein insists that the languages of faith or belief are not internal, but are external to us, and we become a part of them.¹⁰¹⁹

Words [do not make up] propositions that picture the world; rather words are part of the world; they come together in activities, language games, constitutive of practices that comprise the human world.¹⁰²⁰

For Wittgenstein, the reasonableness (or not) of a particular doctrine or belief can only be tested with reference to the language-game to which it belongs. Such a language game must quintessentially be based not on empirical or metaphysical beliefs (for that is the language game of the Enlightenment), but upon the role of such beliefs in the practice of the believer.¹⁰²¹ In other words, for the Christian believer, it is only on the path of discipleship (followship) that the language game of the Christian faith can be played.¹⁰²² And the Way of

¹⁰¹⁹ Cupitt, WS, op. cit., pp. 64-67. Cupitt describes how people think and feel in terms of public story. For Cupitt there is no ‘internal’ person – only the external person. The mind is not deep down, but on the surface, it is a public reality. We only know of the ‘internal’ world because of ‘external’ stories; the private world is a public fiction.
¹⁰²⁰ McClendon, Doctrine, op. cit., p. 251.
¹⁰²¹ McClendon, Doctrine, op. cit., p. 267.
¹⁰²² Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 107. "The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a result of investigation: it was a requirement.) The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming empty. -- We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but
Christ is in itself determinative of the way followers see the world.

Wittgenstein’s insight here is crucial to understanding the way Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic actually works. According to Wittgenstein, for the language of followship to have meaning that is transacted into the lived experience of Christian disciples, then it must be a language game that is played ‘on the way’ with Christ. And for Bonhoeffer this particular language game is all-encompassing. It is not that disciples ‘interpret’ their world differently, but rather, that they ‘see’ the world differently. This approach is also very consistent with Bonhoeffer’s understanding of ethics. Rather than seeing ethics as a matter of ‘right choices’ or interpretation, Bonhoeffer sees ethics as a matter of obedience and faithfulness. Bonhoeffer believes that Christ is already present in the world, and is already for the world, and so there is no need for interpretation. There is a need, however, for identification. There is an all-important need to be able to see Christ, to recognise Christ at work in the world. Thus the hermeneutic of followship formulated by Bonhoeffer, the Incarnated One, the Crucified One, and the Resurrected One, become a lens through which the world is ‘seen’ rather than interpreted.

George Lindbeck builds upon Wittgenstein’s study of language when he seeks to develop a rule theory for theological discourse. Lindbeck observes that the road rules of different countries can be opposite to one another and yet serve the same function. For example, in the United States, drivers are required to keep to the right-hand side of the road, and in Australia also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need friction. Back to the rough ground!”

it is mandated that they drive on the left. The content of these regulations are
in opposition to one another, but the grammar is consistent. All too often
doctrines of faith are presented as various propositions or even nondiscursive
symbols but, in practice, they operate as rules or regulative principles.
Religious faith, then, rightly understood, provides an “overarching, integrating,
and legitimating frame of reference” that seeks to weave the narrative of our
daily living, in terms of the vocabulary of our cognitive attempts of rationalising
our existence, and the grammar of our practice.\textsuperscript{1024}

(Religion) is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description
of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner
attitudes, feelings, and sentiments. Like a culture or language, it is
a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of
individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those
subjectivities. It comprises a vocabulary of discursive and
nondiscursive symbols together with a distinctive logic or grammar
in terms of which this vocabulary can be meaningfully deployed.
Lastly, just as language (or “language game” to use Wittgenstein’s
phrase) is correlated with a form of life, and just as a culture has
both cognitive and behavioural dimensions, so it is also in the case
of a religious tradition. Its doctrines, cosmic stories or myths, and
ethical directives are integrally related to the rituals it practices, the
sentiments or experiences it evokes, the actions it recommends,
and the institutional forms it develops.\textsuperscript{1025}

For Lindbeck, the language game that a particular religion utilizes, and with
this in mind, the language world that it inhabits, is intrinsically formative of the
religious practitioners who constitute its membership.

A comprehensive scheme or story used to structure all dimensions
of existence is not primarily a set of propositions to be believed, but
is rather the medium in which one moves, a set of skills that one
employs in living one’s life. Its vocabulary of symbols and its
syntax may be used for many purposes, only one of which is the

\textsuperscript{1024} Lindbeck, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{1025} Lindbeck, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 33.
formulation of statements about reality. While a religion’s truth claims are of the upmost importance to it (as in the case of Christianity), it is, nevertheless, the conceptual vocabulary and the syntax of inner logic which determines the kind of truth claims the religion can make. The cognitive aspect while important, is not primary.  

and furthermore,

(T)o become religious – no less than to become culturally or linguistically competent – is to interiorize a set of skills by practice and training. One learns how to feel, act, and think in conformity with a religious tradition that is, in its inner structure, far richer and more subtle than can be explicitly articulated. The primary knowledge is not about the religion, nor that the religion teaches such and such, but rather how to be religious in such and such ways. Sometimes explicitly formulated statements of the beliefs or behavioural norms of a religion may be helpful in the learning process, but by no means always. Ritual, prayer and example are normally much more important.  

Lindbeck uses the example of an anthropological study of tribal peoples who cannot differentiate between the colours green and blue. It is not that these particular tribal groups have particular physiological genetic differences to those in our society (such as being colour blind), but rather that they do not have the cultural-linguistic capabilities to differentiate between the colours: there is no separate word for green and blue in their language. Or, to put it another way, those of us who have a language system that is able to identify colours as either green or blue, lack the linguistic a priori to experience these same colours in any other way. Because we have a cultural-linguistic

1026 Lindbeck, op. cit., p. 35.  
1027 Lindbeck, op. cit., p. 35. (Emphasis in original.)  
1028 Lindbeck, op. cit., p. 37. Lindbeck also points to studies by Chomsky and Geertz that conclude that without language human beings cannot properly develop physiologically as they should.
framework that discerns two different colours, green and blue, we can’t help but see them that way.

For Lindbeck and Wittgenstein, language games do not merely re-present the world, they provide the tools and medium through which we experience and participate in the world. Lindbeck suggests an example of two different babies learning a language: imagine one baby learning the dialect of a local village, and another learning a sophisticated global language. At the age of two, both of their linguistic achievements will be comparable. Whether learning a sophisticated language or a primitive dialect, at age two they will both be able to indicate whether they are hungry, tired etc and no more. At age twenty, however, their linguistic abilities will be far different.

In many ways, this is what Bonhoeffer alludes to in his observation of a ‘world come of age’. The world that Bonhoeffer refers to is one that is informed by the ongoing discourse of the academy and the market place. It is a language game that is self-aware and self-critical, and readily opens itself to new influences and conversation partners. Bonhoeffer laments that the language game of the Christian faith he observes is that of an infant, rather than one that is able to provide the adequate sophistication, in terms of vocabulary and grammar, required for adult participation in the world. Bonhoeffer is not suggesting that because the world has ‘come of age’ that it has nothing left to learn. On the contrary, Bonhoeffer is suggesting that the world is now ready to learn, and laments that the church has nothing to say.

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1029 Lindbeck, op. cit., p. 60.
In the end, it is the grammar of doctrine that assists our understanding of both doctrinal meaning and usage in the praxis of faith. Just as more experienced language practitioners have a more ‘developed’ understanding of how grammar works, and so in practice are less likely to make grammatical errors, so too, as we grow in our understanding of doctrinal grammar, we begin to develop a methodology of doctrinal application to new and varied experiences and circumstances. It is not enough to repeat a particular doctrine, regardless of the context, but rather we are required to understand the grammar of the doctrine and thus apply it in our daily lives. Lindbeck shows that this can be seen in the way the Latin amo, amas, amat (to love) is related to rogo, rogas, rogat (to ask). Even though these are very different words, with very different meanings, the same rules of grammar apply. But, of course, as we all learn, every grammatical rule has an exception, and so too it is with doctrine. These exceptions, however, are only discovered in the praxis of a lived faith; they surface within an active, realised, and living language game.

7.4 Wittgenstein and Bonhoeffer: Language Games and Followship

So, what are the implications for this type of hermeneutic? How do we develop a theological grammar that can speak to the issues of faith and life that permeate our daily conversations? When Bonhoeffer insists that ‘Christology begins in silence’, he is of course in agreement with Wittgenstein’s proposition that we dare not speak on matters that defy our attempts at language. And yet the language of faith is merely nonsensical if it

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1030 Lindbeck, op. cit., p. 81.
has nothing to say when called upon.

The key to developing a hermeneutic of followship, however, is found not only in the vocabulary and content of faith, but also in the grammar of our very questions and conversations. As we have already discussed, as early as *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer begins exploring Barth’s dialectical methodology to reframe the existential propositions of foundationalist epistemologies. Questions of truth should be understood in terms of revelation rather than empirical enquiry. This does not mean of course that questions of truth no longer matter; on the contrary, their importance for Bonhoeffer is paramount. Rather, through a hermeneutic of followship, the question of truth is encountered as a disciple of Christ, and as such, the question itself is changed in response to the answer that comes through revelation in Christ.

It is to the question of truth that we now return as an example of how the hermeneutics of followship are necessarily formative to the praxis of the community of faith. The question, ‘what is truth?’ is one that has dogged philosophers for centuries. It is also one that is specifically articulated within the sacred scriptures of the New Testament. For the disciple of Christ, however, the location and context of questions such as this necessarily re-locates and re-contextualizes our enquiry. In John’s Gospel we find this very question on the lips of Pontius Pilate as he interrogates Jesus in preparation for his execution. As we enter into this narrative, however, we discover that the question for disciples is not, ‘what is truth?’, for that is the question of Roman Procurators and Greek Philosophers and those who belong to an

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1031 See in particular Hauerwas, *Performing op. cit.*, pp. 55-75.
1032 John 18:38.
entirely different set of language games. Bonhoeffer’s Christology, on the other hand, demands that the essential question for followship is ‘who?’ Thus the question for those who follow the way of Christ should be ‘who is truth?’ And of course the answer comes to us in the words and personhood of Jesus: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.\textsuperscript{1033}

Reframing or re-ordering the question in this way is not for the purposes of avoiding the scrutiny of those in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom within the secular academy or the \textit{politik} of the market place. Rather, it is by way of recognizing that the language-game of the Christian faith is one in which matters of truth are understood not in relation to propositional theorems, but in the act of followship itself. Just as Wittgenstein maintains that language must be enacted,\textsuperscript{1034} so too, the language of truth within the Christian faith is found in following the way of Christ. For Christians, therefore, truth resides in a person. It is not found in a theory but in a practice.\textsuperscript{1035}

Lindbeck also enters our discussion on truth by identifying our need to have an agreed language game in terms of the very framework of how truth is identified, contemplated, and realized. Lindbeck postulates that both poetry and mathematics can articulate truth, but they do so in very different ways.

\textsuperscript{1033} John 14:6.  
\textsuperscript{1034} See also Staten, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 113. Austin talks about the ethics of language in the speech-act. When you make a statement, it is assumed to be a statement of truth. Statements are performative of truth, but we can only speak truth about what we know – and are competent to know. “It is essential to realise that ‘true’ and ‘false’, like ‘free’ and ‘unfree’ do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for a general dimension of being a right or proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes, and with these intentions.” Rather than seeing communication as ‘transporting’ an ‘already constituted’ meaning, Derrida sees that Austin speaks of communication as ‘producing’ or ‘transforming’ meaning.  
\textsuperscript{1035} Cupitt, \textit{WS, op. cit.}, p. 81. Cupitt suggests that truth only exists inside fiction – inside narrative. He also suggests that because we are the creators of fiction that we are the creators of truth.
Mathematical formulae rely on a numerical system through which to interpret and understand our lived experience, often eventuating in definitive answers about what is true and what is not. Poetry, on the other hand, may seek to be a vehicle for truth in ways that mathematics cannot, but it would hardly claim to be definitive. Both vehicles for truth, however, do not make sense when examined together. Mathematics may be an effective medium for articulating truth claims in certain contexts, but that does not mean that every mathematical formula is true. It also does not mean that every poem is good. Whereas it does not make sense to debate the truth about whether one object is heavier than another if you have no concept of weight, it also makes no sense to read a sonnet about the soul when the existence of such an entity is completely foreign. In other words, categorical truth does not preclude propositional error. Just as the Christian faith may make a claim for categorical truth as it understands God’s covenant with creation through the person and work of Christ, it may also contain propositional error if it maintains that someone must be ‘a Christian’ in order to be ‘saved’.

Lindbeck uses a cartographic simile to further explain his thesis. A map is only useful to the extent that it helps a person find the location they are looking for. It may be true in every way, but if it cannot be read, then it is of no use. It may be able to be read, but it may be inaccurate (distances may be wrong) and yet still get people to the right destination. It may be very accurate but be of no use (ie a map of the South Pacific and the desired destination is Jerusalem). It may be very accurate and yet false, deliberately leading people in the opposite direction (for eg to Moscow or New York rather than

1036 Lindbeck, op. cit., p. 52.
than Jerusalem). Some maps may be partially helpful, beginning well and then becoming obscure as the destination comes closer, or some maps may be incomplete, only getting the traveler to a certain point in the journey. Then there is the realisation that even though a map may be true and accurate and easy to read – it does not mean that those reading it won’t misuse it either deliberately or due to human error. In other words, truth is only true for a particular person if it is a lived experience.

Lindbeck refers to the difference between what he refers to as ‘intrasystematic’ truth and ontological truth.\(^{1037}\) It may be an intrasystematic truth to say that Clark Kent is the alter ego of Superman, but it is only ontologically true if Superman is a real being. For the early followers of Jesus to say that Christ is Lord may be systematically true for the story they are living, but the question of whether it is ontologically true, is another question altogether. Further to this, to shout ‘Christ is Lord’ as a member of the crusades when slaying an infidel is an intrasystematic falsehood because it does not correlate to the truth of the gospel stories that insist on loving your enemy and turning the other cheek. For Lindbeck, intrasystematic truth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for ontological truth.

\begin{quote}
\hspace{1cm}a religious utterance ... acquires the propositional truth of ontological correspondence only insofar as it is a performance, an act or deed, which helps create that correspondence.\(^{1038}\)
\end{quote}

For Lindbeck not only must truth be enacted, but truth is also limited to the language game in which it participates.

\(^{1037}\) Lindbeck, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 64.
\(^{1038}\) Lindbeck, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 65. A further example of this can be seen in the area of Physics. Newtonian Physics is systematically true and is still used in the calculations of mechanics etc, but it has been proven to be ontologically untrue when considering the theory of relativity.
Just as grammar by itself affirms nothing either true or false regarding the world in which language is used, but only about language, so theology and doctrine, to the extent that they are second order activities, assert nothing either true or false about God and his relation to creatures, but only speak about such assertions. These assertions, in turn, cannot be made except when speaking religiously.  

Bonhoeffer specifically addresses our capacity to speak words of truth in his *Ethics*. For Bonhoeffer the act of telling the truth is something that is learned; like fellowship itself, it is in many ways a performance. Truth is not so much concerned with moral principle as it is with faithfulness to Christ. The words we speak do not convey truth in and of themselves, but are intrinsic to the language game and narrative context of the lived experiences of the speaker and listener alike. The truth, therefore, is that which contains the good news of Jesus Christ, which is news of forgiveness and liberation, justice and peace. Even if to speak such truth it is necessary to say that which is not quantifiably correct or factual, allegiance to the ‘truth of Christ’ must take precedence.

Bonhoeffer gives the example of child telling a lie to prevent shame falling upon his father. In this instance, says Bonhoeffer, a greater truth is maintained, the truth of the priority and dignity of the family. There are other times when something is said in order to injure another party, or promote division, words such as these are never ‘true’, even if they are factually accurate.

1039 Lindbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
The truthful word is not in itself constant; it is as much alive as life itself. If it is detached from life and from its reference to the concrete other man, if ‘the truth is told’ without taking into account to whom it is addressed, then its truth has only the appearance of truth, but it lacks its essential character.1042

So, how are we to make sense of what we have thus far discovered? Bonhoeffer’s doctoral studies locate our understanding of selfhood in terms of community; we are who we are in relation to those around us. As disciples of Christ, the Church understands itself as being for others, in terms of its location and its direction: disciples live in the world, and disciples are for the world. Even though there is no evidence that Bonhoeffer even knew of Wittgenstein’s work, his approach to selfhood in relation to community is very similar to Wittgenstein’s findings in relation to language.1043 Just as Bonhoeffer would scoff at the idea of a private faith, so too, Wittgenstein rejects the idea of a private language.1044 Rather than language beginning on the inside (with our own thoughts and feelings) and then finding an agreed public meaning, Wittgenstein insists language works the other way around: it is the agreed public meaning of language that gives rise the sense of meaning that our thoughts and feelings seek to articulate. And this meaning comes to fulfillment through action: language is performed.1045

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1042 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 360.
1043 de Lange, op. cit. de Lange makes the same observation, that there is no evidence that Bonhoeffer was aware of Wittgenstein’s work, but suggests that his theology, and in particular his Christology, would be different if he had. I disagree with this assessment. Similarities and connections between Wittgenstein’s work and Barth’s theology of the Word are well attested. See also Linbeck, op. cit. As I have already shown, Bonhoeffer’s Christology finds its roots with Barth’s dialectical approach.
1044 See for example Wittgenstein’s famous ‘Beetle in a Box’ analogy in Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., no. 293.
1045 Staten, op. cit., p. 67. The reason Wittgenstein continually evokes what he calls the scene of language as the locus of meaning (rather than context) is because for Wittgenstein language is a performance. See also Cupitt, WS, op. cit., p. 47. “You don’t first have a
Bonhoeffer’s understanding of followship draws conclusions that are surprisingly parallel to Wittgenstein. For Bonhoeffer followship is also something that is performed. Bonhoeffer is more interested in how words are used in relation to faith than what words are used.

The proletarian does not say, ‘Jesus is God.’ But when he says that ‘Jesus is a good man’, he is saying more than the bourgeois says when he repeats, ‘Jesus is God.’ God is for him something belonging to the church. But, Jesus can be present on the factory floor as the socialist; at a political meeting, as an idealist; in the workers world, as a good man. He fights in their ranks against the enemy, Capitalism.

It is in following the call of Christ, that the doctrines and ethics of faith are enacted. And, of course, we have seen this thinking develop all the way through Bonhoeffer’s writing. In Act and Being and Sanctorum Communio we see the foundations of his hermeneutic in relation to the performance of faith that is, in being-for-others. In Creation and Fall and Christ the Centre we see Bonhoeffer developing his Christological hermeneutic in relation to the exegesis of scripture: Christ is the centre of scripture; Christ is the centre of the Church; Christ is the centre of the world. In Nachfolge and Life Together we get to see what the performance of faith looks like in the discipleship community and the imperative of followship. In Ethics and Letters and Papers from Prison we see the performance of faith in the world: being-Christ-for-others. And, all throughout, it is the Incarnated One, the Crucified One, and

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feeling and then search for the right word for it; on the contrary, the right word brings the feeling.”

1046 Hauerwas, Performing, op. cit.
1047 Bonhoeffer, CC op. cit., p. 35. See also de Lange, op. cit., p. 11. Frits suggests (fn 20) that we would benefit from utilising a speech-act methodology that ‘considers a word to be an action and, in line with semiotics an action to be a word’ when dealing with Bonhoeffer.
the Resurrected One that becomes the signpost for identifying the person and work of Christ both in the church, and in the world.

The primary confession of the Christian may be the deed that interprets itself, but according to Bonhoeffer our lives cannot be seen as such a deed. Only ‘Jesus’ testimony to himself stands by itself, self authenticating.”

In Wittgenstein’s studies of the concept of reading we also find some alluring parallels with Bonhoeffer’s notion of followship formation. Wittgenstein questions if we actually know what takes place when someone learns to read. Is it memory, interpretation, repetition, invention, or something else all together? Staten, in his investigation of the linguistic approaches of Derrida and Wittgenstein, puts it this way,

What we call ‘reading’ is an assemblage of characteristics which in each separate case of reading will be variously reconstituted, and in these different reassemblies there will always be the infection of characteristics of what does not correspond to what we want to think of as really, essentially reading. (It is as though these characteristics had a dual membership in two mutually exclusive sets.)… All we have is the grammar of accidental transformations of related assemblages of inessentials. It sounds incoherent, chaotic; but it was in just such scenes as these that we learned to speak.

Just as language itself enables and empowers us to read, so too, it is followship that enables and empowers us to faith. In this regard, Wittgenstein refers to what he calls preparation. Pointing at an object and saying ‘this is such and such’, relies on a pre-existing agreed convention that pointing is contingent with identification (rather than a command, or a reference to shape

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1048 Hauerwas, Performing, op. cit., p. 36.
1049 See also Lindbeck, op. cit., p. 22.
1050 Staten, op. cit., pp. 85-86.
or colour.

So too, the conventions of discipleship/followship formation are already agreed upon within the community of faith. The gathering of the community of believers around the central narratives of the Christian faith, as articulated in Holy Scripture and the traditions of the Church, constitute a pointing that seeks to identify the very nature of followship itself. In this way, followship always has a direction towards Christ.

In trying to understand the way language seeks to convey meaning, Wittgenstein once more returns to the correlation between words and pictures. Wittgenstein postulates that a picture, even a mental picture, cannot determine its own meaning. If a picture is used in a particular sequence of pictures, placed into a PowerPoint presentation, or inserted into a video, it will have an entirely different meaning depending on the context of the other pictures around it; so too it is with the way words are used in language; and so too it is with our understanding of narrative followship formation. It is not enough to say that a disciple is formed by prayer. The nature of the prayer, the content of the prayer, the occasion of the prayer, the theological flavour of the prayer, the person or group who are praying, the person or group who are listening, are all factors in determining the meaning of the prayer, and in turn, the followship formation that takes place.

For Wittgenstein the rules of language are not systemic but rather syntactic. In other words, there is a fluidity about the meaning of language that is both dynamic and intuitive. This is not to say that words can mean

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1051 Staten, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
1052 Staten, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
1053 Staten, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
anything, but rather that the meaning of the word is not contained within the word.

According to Wittgenstein, a rule, when there is a rule, a boundary, when there is a boundary, determines but need not be determinate. We learn to follow it, obey it, or manipulate it, and yet the rule itself is structurally or essentially indeterminate. A rule is best thought of as an object which happens to be used as a standard of comparison within some practice or other. Because any social practice is carried on by different persons who will vary from each other in their sense of how to apply any given rule, any form of life is always transacted by diverging lines of possible practice: a form is a transitive essence always in process of essential variation from itself. On this view a form of life has no self-identical and unitary form, nor does a rule, nor do we.\textsuperscript{1054}

The challenge for Christian theology then, is to integrate this subjective’ experience of followship into a collective understanding that can be embraced by the discipleship community. When Bonhoeffer talks of the collective person in \textit{Sanctorum Communio} and \textit{Act and Being}, he is already beginning to articulate the notion of the personhood of the followship community. And so, it is the collective person of Christ who individually and collectively calls the collective person of the Church to follow the path of discipleship. The language of this call is both subjective and collective, because it is the language of a relationship that exists between the two collective persons, and also between the One who calls and the one who follows.

Thus, the collective language of faith may be used in times of individual doubt. The collective language of hope may be used in times of individual fear. The collective language of forgiveness may be used in times of personal

\textsuperscript{1054} Staten, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 134.
brokenness and sin. It is not that the collective language of the community seeks to silence or distort or invalidate the language of the individual, but rather that the collective provides a new language that seeks to give voice, and transform, and validate the experience of the individual who finds their being in community with others. This is the language of followship. And as we shall soon discover, this new language is best understood through the power of story.

What we call our life, our troubles, and our guilt is by no means the whole of reality; our life, our need, our guilt, and our deliverance are there in the scriptures... Only in the Holy Scriptures do we get to know our own story.  

1055 Bonhoeffer, LT, op. cit., p. 62.
Chapter Eight:
Following the Story

Faith begins not in discovery, but in remembrance.¹⁰⁵⁶

Whenever Baal Shem Tov had something difficult to do, some secret work that would benefit God’s creatures, he would go into the forest, to a particular place, light a fire and pray, sunk in meditation. This all took place as he had planned. A generation later, when the Maggid of Meseritz had to do the same, he also went to the same place in the forest and said: “We cannot make the fire, but we can say the prayers,” and everything went according to his plan. A generation later, Rabbi Moses Leib of Sassov wanted to do the same. He also went into the forest and said: “We cannot light the fire and we no longer know the secret meditations, which animated the prayer, but we know the place in the forest where it was done and that must be enough for us.” And it was enough. A generation later, however, when Rabbi Israel of Rishin had to do the same, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle and said, “We cannot light a fire, we can no longer say the prayers and we do not know the place, but we can tell the story.”¹⁰⁵⁷

For me the initial delight is in the surprise of remembering something I didn’t know I knew.¹⁰⁵⁸

The praxis of followship clearly stands inside a particular language game. That this should be so necessarily implies that its inspiration and expression lie within a specific story line; disciples following along ‘the Way’ with Christ. No matter the Sitz im Leben of the New Testament authors, no matter the socio-political context of those who are reading discipleship texts, the hermeneutic of the Incarnated One, the Crucified One and the Resurrected

One must always be the guiding principle for the followship imperative. To validate this assertion, however, we must look beyond adherence to specific language games of faith and followship and delve into the very nature of narrative itself. For it is the story of followship that comes to us from the New Testament that is itself the primary witness to the necessity of the Way of Christ. It is this relationship between language and story, between the call to follow and the narrative of followship, that we shall now turn our attention.

In the previous chapter, we began by asserting that the study of language was an ontological discipline (and in this way akin to theology). What is not said, that which escapes or defies language, has ontological primacy as well. It is for this reason that Bonhoeffer begins his seminal treatise on Christology with the doxological assertion that theology rightly understood begins with silence.\textsuperscript{1059} Wittgenstein, studying the ontological implications of the philosophy of language, draws a comparable conclusion: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."\textsuperscript{1060} It is this notion of silence, this otherness to the created order that provokes theological imaginings. For Derrida the impossible possibility of Divine presence is created via the absence of language (or the presence of nonlanguage) and alongside his notion of differânce we also see a fleeting glimpse of Karl Barth’s concept of the Wholly Otherness of God.\textsuperscript{1061} In different ways, all of these great thinkers are reminding us of something we already know – silence is not the same as

\textsuperscript{1059} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 27. “Teaching about Christ begins in silence... To speak of Christ means to keep silent; to keep silent about Christ means to speak. When the Church speaks rightly out of a proper silence, then Christ is proclaimed.”
\textsuperscript{1060} Wittgenstein, Tractatus, op. cit., no. 7.1.
absence. And, in fact, silence can itself be the invocation of a special form of presence.\(^{1062}\)

But silence finds its power when it sits inside a story, for it is the existence of a story that pre-empts the necessity for something to be said. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, we will build on our study of followship and our naming of theology as grammar, and discover that the followship imperative is ingrained in story, for all truth is given meaning in story-form. By studying the way stories work, we will discover the way the call to follow Christ both exists in story-form, and is enacted in the very story-telling of our lives. Our investigation will thus move us from a more analytic approach to the study of language (Wittgenstein), to the establishment of a hermeneutical method that will better inform and equip our followship imperative.\(^{1063}\) In doing so, we will discover that the story of followship we read about as the first disciples learn the way of Christ in the pages of the New Testament, and the performance of faith we see in the life of Bonhoeffer,\(^{1064}\) are merely different translations of the same narrative.

8.1 Time and Narrative

In the gospel accounts, when Jesus calls the disciples to follow – he calls them out of an existence that is unknown to readers. In terms of the narrative he calls them out of nothingness into a new reality. The disciples are

\(^{1062}\) Staten, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 120.

\(^{1063}\) See also Ricoeur, P., \textit{Oneself as Another}, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p. 17. Ricoeur describes the ‘constructive confrontation’ between analytic philosophy and hermeneutics, as the questions of ‘what’? and ‘why’? coming face to face with the question of ‘who’?.

\(^{1064}\) Hauerwas, \textit{Performing, op. cit.}
introduced only as followers. Their past is silenced; it is their followship that
gives them voice, and their voice exists only as followers. The followship
narrative, existing within language, creates their existence. And as we read
their story as followers of Christ, their story in turn creates ours. The call to
followship, then, is an act of creation akin to the creation narrative of Genesis
1.

But the call of Christ that comes to us from the gospel narratives does not
speak to an unknown past. We already live in a world of stories. Our context
is not silent. The cacophony of competing voices and stories that engulf us,
all seek dominance and demand our allegiance. Yet, in the midst of this
dissonance the call to followship remains; and the call to follow renders all
other voices silent. It is as if when Christ calls, silence is ‘created’, so that the
call to follow may be heard.

Not only does language create silence, because we live in a world formed by
language, even when there is no word language is still at work. For it is
language that has named the silence we experience, and language that forms
the hopes and memories that seek to remember and prepare us for times
when words are spoken. We dare to break silence, the special space of
meaning and presence, because of our desire to name the silence, to define
it, to capture its power. But as Wittgenstein has revealed for us, words do not
have the ability to do anything in and of themselves. It all depends on how
they are used. In order to name the silence, in order to name ourselves, we
use words in a special way – we tell stories.

How did stories come into being? Ah, stories came into the
world because God was lonely.
God was lonely? Oh, yes, for you see, the void at the beginning of time was very dark. The void was dark because it was so tightly packed with stories that not even one story stood out from the others.

Stories were therefore without form, and the face of God moved over the deep, searching and searching – for a story. And God's loneliness was very great.

Finally, a great idea rose up, and God whispered, 'Let there be light.'
And there was light so great that God was able to reach into the void and separate the dark stories from the stories of light. As a result, clear morning stories came to life, and fine evening tales as well. And God saw that it was good...

...So God created human beings from the dust of the ground, and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life, and human beings became living souls: male and female God created them.

And as these were created, suddenly, all the stories that go along with being completely human also sprang to life, millions and millions of stories...

...Now God strode through the heavens wreathed in smiles, for at last, you see, God was lonely no more. It was not stories that had been missing from creation, but rather, and most especially, the soulful humans who could tell them.1065

Thus, the Genesis creation account, the story that dares to break the silence, does so not in terms of propositional certainty or speculative assertion, but with creative narration.1066 The story narrates that which was spoken, not

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1065 Estes, C.P., *The Faithful Gardener: A Wise Tale About That Which Can Never Die*, Rider, London, 1996, p.5-9. See also Cupitt, WS, *op. cit.*, p. 50. Cupitt critiques a purely structuralist understanding of mythology as that which seeks to reconcile natural binary opposites (evil-good, earth-heaven etc). "What stories ultimately satisfy is life's hunger for itself, its desire to exist, its desire to be turned on, its desire to be give form and made able to flow... Stories create and produce life, and satisfy life's paradoxical inchoate yearning to be brought into being."

1066 Cupitt, WS, *op. cit.*, p. 54. "We have always entirely misunderstood the phrase 'creation myth'. We have supposed that it meant merely a picturesque description of a cosmic event that took place at the very beginning of time. But creation myths are myths not about
only within the story itself, but as it was told, passed down from generation to
generation within the oral traditions of the Hebrew people.

Over time, however, a transition takes place from spoken word to written
word. The lived experience of a story told and heard in time, now becomes
somehow out of time as it is written down. It is eternalized, immortalized,
objectified, visualized, and as such, the story itself is alienated from the
process of story-telling. The story is no longer a public affair, requiring both a
speaker and a listener. The story is no longer a performance, requiring an
actor and an audience. The story is no longer an ‘act’ in itself, requiring
intentionality and participation. Instead, it seems as if the story exists external
to community, waiting to be read, like artwork hanging in a museum. Now this
of course is not the case. Language is formed in time and bound by time.
Grammar itself is both a primordial indicator and a necessity of time. As Don
Cupitt writes,

…sentences take time to utter, as they also take time to hear
or peruse. With its subject-verb-object structure, the sentence
has already the shape of an action. It may be used to perform
an action, or it may evoke, or comment upon or simulate an
action. At any rate, a sentence is the intelligible form of an
action. It is being invested with sentences, and guided by
sentences, that a bit of physical behaviour becomes a
purposeful deed. To act upon a sentence, or even just to
understand it, takes time. So the spoken language is
completely temporal, the temporally-ordered succession of
sounds in a sentence being exactly matched to the succession

‘creation’ in that cosmological sense, but about myth itself and its creative power. It evokes
desire, order experiences and maintains life. That is, the creation myth coincides with itself,
for it is a story too, and the most potent story, the story about the potency of story. The
creation myth is the creative myth of how myth creates, ordering experience, creating value
and shaping life. The creation myth – and almost every human knows one – is the story that
enacts the creative power of stories, the many narratives that are going on in us all the time,
and in which we live.’
of motions of the body-forces that run with the sentence, and under its guidance flow out into action.\textsuperscript{1067}

Not only the spoken word, but also the written word, exists in time. It turns out that the written word is not as objective or external to our lived experience as we might have first imagined. All our attempts to situate language external to our own experience are in the end futile, for we have learned from Wittgenstein that such words simply have no meaning.\textsuperscript{1068}

Cupitt further observes that

> Even written sentences still take time to read. Texts are not really non-temporal, any more than musical scores are… A piece of language or a piece of music simply consists in the manner and sequence in which it arouses our body-forces as it moves across the surface of our sensibility. There is no truly non-successive, non-temporal knowledge, or language, or music, or even meaningfulness.\textsuperscript{1069}

Not only does language exist in time, language also relies on the sequential nature of time in order for meaning to be collected and collated and then recalled. Without the primordial necessity of retention, even the most elemental understandings of meaning would be lost. The present that we occupy always retains an element of that which has gone before. This notion of ‘representifying’ is perhaps best understood when looking at the example of music. Each musical note in and of itself, when played alone, is simply a product of audio percussion/vibration. When a note is placed within a

\textsuperscript{1067} Cupitt, WS, op. cit., p. 1.
\textsuperscript{1068} Wittgenstein, PI, op. cit., pt2, p. 223, “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him.” Wittgenstein is talking here about language games – but the idea of ‘a language external to our own existence’ is quite germane. Language that is objectified has no meaning, because meaning is found in the way words are used. Even if the lion has a comprehensible vocabulary, the grammar of the lion’s language system would be completely foreign to our understanding.
\textsuperscript{1069} Cupitt, WS, op. cit., p. 4.
sequence of notes – a key, a rhythm, a melody, however, is discernible. It is the notes that go before, and the manner in which they are performed, that gives each present note its identity. When a note is played its presence lingers in the mind of the hearer in order to give meaning to the notes that follow. Language, and in particular, language in the form of narrative, works the same way.

So language is intrinsic to time just as stories are intrinsic to language. Cupitt postulates that most stories have three essential elements to them: (i) Stories have a sequence that relies on a play between continuity and discontinuity; (ii) There is a linearity of time within story; (iii) Stories help make time visible to us. And yet this relationship between narrative and time is not merely one sided. It is not as though narratives are purely dependent upon time alone – for the opposite is also true: time itself is the intersection of narratives. According to Cupitt, time and narrative constitute one another. There is no such thing as an absolute present, only a fictionalized one: we can only name the present as present because of the position it occupies in narrative form.

The relationship between time and narrative is of great importance to the praxis of followship. Claims and transactions of truth and meaning do not exist within ideological or narrative vacuums. Every proposition has a before and an after. Every assertion exists within time; every truth-claim only finds

1070 See Staten, *op. cit.*, p. 51. “Thus ‘retention’ is a phenomenologically descriptive concept that acknowledges the fact that perception in any given moment is informed immediately by the sense of what has immediately preceded it and is not a self-contained, isolated thing.”
1072 Ricoeur, P., *Time and Narrative*, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1984, p. 3. (Referred to as *TN* from here on.)
meaning in narrative form. The truth that comes to us does not exist ‘out there’ in some sort of objectified or idealized reality, but in stories, told and retold through time. In order to understand the totality of the claim of the fellowship imperative, we must come to a greater understanding of how such stories work.

One of the more prolific contributors to the discussion of time and narrative is Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur examines this relationship in a monumental three-volume study\(^{1074}\) beginning with what he refers to as the skeptical argument:

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\text{that time has } \textbf{no being} \text{ because the future is not yet, the past is no longer and the present does not remain… and yet we say that the future } \textbf{will be}, \text{ the past } \textbf{was}, \text{ and the present is } \textbf{passing away}.^{1075}
\]

He compares this with the refreshing honesty of Augustine’s paradox - that any discourse on time, exists within time itself:

\[
\text{what then is time? I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled}.^{1076}
\]

Through Augustine, Ricoeur argues that the past and future can only exist in the present. Augustine’s ‘dialectic of the threefold present’\(^{1077}\) recognizes that the past is accessible in the present through memory, the present through direct perception and the future through expectation. It is through the power of narrative that time itself is formulated, manipulated and understood. It is


\(^{1075}\) Ricoeur, TN, op. cit., p. 7.

\(^{1076}\) Confessions 14:17 in Ricoeur, TN, op. cit., p. 7.

\(^{1077}\) Ricoeur, TN, op. cit., p. 13.
through narrative that our memories, our perceptions and our expectations acquire meaning.

We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative.

Ricoeur’s analysis of narrative results in a claim of interdependence with time (similar to Cupitt), but for Ricoeur, narrative also has an ‘intent’ that must be acknowledged. It is here that Ricoeur makes use of Aristotle’s notion of *muthos* (*emplotment*). Aristotle’s theory of emplotment articulates a mimetic relationship between the performance of an act of drama, on the one hand, and the lived experience of the daily drama of human action, on the other. Aristotle suggests that it is the ‘poetic’ response of fictionalized drama that enables the ‘full meaning’ of lived experience to be realized in the cathartic response of the intended audience.

Generalizing beyond Aristotle, I shall say that mimesis, marks the intersection of the world of text and the world of hearer and reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds in specific temporality.

Ricoeur combines Aristotle’s analysis of *muthos* with Augustine’s analyses of time and characterizes the ‘most original features of narrative temporality’ as

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1078 Ricoeur, *TN*, op. cit., p. 75.
1079 Ricoeur, *TN*, op. cit., p. 3. “(U)ltimately at stake in the case of the structural identity of the narrative function as well as in that of the truth claim of every narrative work, is the temporal character of human experience. The world unfolded by every narrative is always a temporal world.” Also, p. 52, “(B)etween the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity... time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.”
1081 Ricoeur, *TN*, op. cit., p. 70. “(N)arrative has its full meaning when it is restored to the time of action and suffering in mimesis”.
a ‘discordant concordance’. In other words, by examining how these great thinkers approach the subjects of time and narrative from very different perspectives, Ricoeur is able to find new ideas emerging from within the space created by their clash of differing methodologies and ideologies. Rather than assuming an either/or approach to their theses, Ricoeur plays with the notion of both/and.

Ricoeur then concludes his study of mimesis and meaning by suggesting that, “the question of the relationship between time and narrative culminates in (a) dialectic between an aporetics (Augustine) and poetics (Aristotle).” Indeed, Ricoeur further states that, “the poetics of narrativity responds and corresponds to the aporetics of temporality”, formulating a relationship of codependence at the core of the transaction between lived experience, narrative, and meaning.

For Ricoeur narrative has the unique capacity of dividing time into two distinct and yet interrelated phenomena: “the time of the act of narrating and the time of the things narrated.” This significant distinction creates a creative gap between remembrance and that which is being remembered, and by doing so allows for new meanings and interpretations to appear. Ricoeur’s theorizing helps to identify some of the powerful hermeneutical keys that are at play when we seek to interpret history that necessarily comes to us in narrative form, and can also only be viewed in the context of our lived narrative experience. In this way, Ricoeur rejects the notion of separating so-called

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1083 Ricoeur, TN2, op. cit., p. 5.
1084 Ricoeur, TN, op. cit., p. 71.
1085 Ricoeur, TN, op. cit., p. 84.
1086 Ricoeur, TN2, op. cit., p. 5.
historical truth claims from the narratives that seek to describe them. Rather, he sees them as intrinsically and ontologically interrelated, not only in terms of communal historical understanding, but also in terms of individual existential meaning. Ricoeur’s methodology insists upon the intersection of the textual world (historical context and narrative form) and the world of the reader:

Only then does the literary work acquire a meaning in the full sense of the term, at the intersection of the world projected by the text, and the life world of the reader.\footnote{Ricoeur, \textit{TN2}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 160.}

Ricoeur’s analysis is best understood in relation to the Gospel of Mark, the quintessential followship narrative. At the beginning of Mark’s gospel there is a sense of immediacy that is somewhat breathtaking.\footnote{The word ‘immediately’ occurs 42 times in Mark’s Gospel (Gk: \(\varepsilon\iota\theta\iota\varsigma\)).} The pace of the narrative, and the paratactic style,\footnote{410 of the 678 verses in the original Greek version of Mark’s Gospel begin with the word ‘And’ (Gk. \(\kappa\alpha\tau\)).} invite the reader headlong into confrontation with the powers: there is no time to rest, there is no time to reconsider, there is only the sense of immediacy, and an unconditional call for unqualified obedience. When we come to the passion narrative in Jerusalem, it is as if time seems to halt: of the sixteen chapters in Mark’s Gospel, five are devoted to the last week in Jesus’ life. This change of pace invites the reader to slow down with the narrative, and to consider the gravitas of the cross event.

After investigating the way narrative works in relation ‘to’ time and ‘in’ time, Ricoeur now seeks to explore the way narrative works within the confines of its own form and structure. Ricoeur insists that each narrative form, no matter how creative or confronting, must have its own internal coherence somewhere
on the continuum of the poetic to the *aporetic*.\textsuperscript{1090} This internal coherence insists on the ability of the author to imagine and construct a ‘believable world’ whereby a willing reader is able to inhabit and engage with the fictive reality created. This imagined reality is encountered by the reader as if it is something ‘from the past’ posited into the reader’s present, for the normative of fictive writing is in the preterit tense.\textsuperscript{1091} In this way, the narrative form takes on a quasi-historical genre, and fiction masquerades as history.

Returning to Aristotle’s requirement of audience catharsis in order for narrative to achieve its full meaning, Ricoeur now modifies his original thesis by arguing that to,

\begin{quotation}
\textit{give full scope to the theme of interaction [between writer, work and reader] the phenomenology of the act of reading requires a flesh-and-blood reader, who, in actualizing the role of the reader prestructured in and through the text, transforms it.}\textsuperscript{1092}
\end{quotation}

Every literary text implies a reader and an author and, in order to receive the text, each reader in a sense re-configures the text by their very act of reading.

This intersection of the reader, the implied reader, and the implied author constitutes,

\begin{quotation}
\textit{the fusion but not confusion of the horizons of expectations of the text and those of the reader, [uniting] these two moments of refigurations in the fragile unity of stasis and impetus}\textsuperscript{1093}
\end{quotation}

Ricoeur suggests that both individuals and communities are in a sense created by the very stories they tell about themselves. The so-called facts of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{1090} Ricoeur, *TN3*, op. cit., p. 177. “(F)iction is bound internally by the very thing that it projects outside itself”.
\item\textsuperscript{1091} Ricoeur, *TN3*, op. cit., p. 190.
\item\textsuperscript{1092} Ricoeur, *TN3*, op. cit., p. 171.
\item\textsuperscript{1093} Ricoeur, *TN3*, op. cit., p. 179.
\end{enumerate}
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history are not objective markers to be evaluated with the neutrality of time and space offering some sort of subjective buffer. Rather, the question of history is a question of ‘who?’, not ‘what?’ or ‘how?’, and is as subjective as any analysis of human identity and agency.\(^{1094}\)

By asking the question of ‘who?’ Ricoeur is emphasizing the place of testimony and witness in our understanding of history and truth and identity. We can also see the connection here with Bonhoeffer’s primary question for Christology. Christology and narrative are co-dependent. Just as stories always involve a ‘who’, both in terms of narrative content and also readership, so too does Christology.

Now although it may be evident that a contemporary Australian readership provides a very different ‘who’ in relation to the followship imperative when compared with Bonhoeffer, and indeed the first disciples of the New Testament, it is still the same Christ who calls. And the ‘who’ of Bonhoeffer’s Christology always locates the identity of Christ in relationship to those who are called; a relationship that is always ‘pro me’, whoever ‘I’ might be. Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic of the Incarnate One, the Crucified One and the Resurrected One identifies our understanding of narrative Christology as ‘historical’ in the sense that it is always part of a story that occurs within time. Thus Christ is for me, as I find myself in Christ’s story, and it is a story that is as historical in its retelling, as it was two thousand years ago.

Ricoeur’s understanding of ‘who?’ in relation to history is also bound up in the notion of remembrance. It is this process of discovering the ‘who’ of history,

\(^{1094}\) Ricoeur, *TN3*, op. cit., p. 246.
and ultimately of ourselves, that is the cornerstone of the quest for an authentic remembrance. And because the stories of the New Testament come to us from the past and invade our narrative present, the way we remember them is vitally important.

8.2 Narrative and Remembrance.

The best way to understand the relationship between remembrance and narrative is to tell a story.

In the second instalment of the Matrix trilogy, Matrix Reloaded, the great prophet Morpheus addresses a gathered throng of the desperate and the fearful. It appears that the subterranean human colony of dislocated cyber-citizens, analogously labelled the city of Zion, is tragically doomed. In a scene reminiscent of the rhetorical prophetic traditions of the Hebrew Bible, Morpheus implores the gathered people not to be afraid. Even as he speaks, literally millions of robotic killers are converging on the embattled metropolis seeking to annihilate all form of human life. Morpheus seemingly stands in obstinate defiance of the inevitable apocalyptic destiny that awaits.

Zion, hear me! It is true what many of you have heard. The machines have gathered an army, and as I speak, that army is drawing nearer to our home (a nervous murmur rises from the crowd). Believe me when I say that we have a difficult time ahead of us. But if we are to be prepared for it, we must first shed our fear of it. I stand before you now, truthfully unafraid. Why? Because I

believe something you do not? No! I stand here without fear because I remember. I remember that I am here not because of the path that lies before me, but because of the path that lies behind me. I remember that for one hundred years we have fought these machines. I remember that for one hundred years they have sent their armies to destroy us. And after a century of war, I remember that which matters most: we are still here! Tonight, let us send a message to that army. Tonight let us shake this cave. Tonight let us tremble these halls of earth, steel and stone. Let us be heard from red core to black sky. Tonight let us make them remember: this is Zion and we are not afraid.

For Morpheus it is the remembering of stories that have gone before that give him the courage and hope to overcome what seem to be insurmountable odds. This power of remembrance, rightly understood within a narrative hermeneutical paradigm, becomes a programme of existential re-membrance: rediscovering one’s membership of the world around them. Re-membering stories is about making sense of the world – of finding a place of belonging and meaning through stories that are told, shared and lived. To re-member a story is to find oneself within it and thus become a member of the narrative itself. 1096

The fictional character of Morpheus is analogous to one we might find in the Hebrew prophetic tradition. He remembers formative stories from the past that shape his understanding of the future that lies ahead. This in turn gives meaning to his present. But because it is a shared story – a communal story – it is not just Morpheus’ past, future and present that is at stake. It is instead

1096 See Cupitt, WS, op. cit., pp. 53-77. See also Volf, M., The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2006. (Referred to as EM from here on.) Kindle Location 243. “When we remember the past, it is not only past; it breaks into the present and gains a new lease on life.”
the shared understanding of the community that gives meaning to the stories he tells.

In contemporary Australia, the way our collective history is understood is hotly contested. Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey compares and contrasts the competing dominant formation narratives as the ‘Three Cheers’ view of history versus the ‘Black Armband’ view: the overly optimistic versus the penitent.1097

The way Australia collectively remembers such historical moments as the arrival of the British in 1788, the ANZAC campaigns of the First World War, and more recently the treatment of indigenous peoples in relation to the ‘Stolen Generations’,1098 informs not only our understanding of past events, but also our sense of self in the present. The role of the Christian church and the Judeo Christian tradition in the story of Australia’s formation is also quite contentious. For some it is a history to be celebrated, for others it is one filled with pain and guilt and shame,1099 or perhaps even indifference.

1097 Blainey, G., In our Time: The Issues and People of Our Century, Information Australia, Melbourne, 1999. In his seminal 1993 Latham Lecture Blainey explains “(t)o some extent my generation was reared on the Three Cheers view of history. This patriotic view of our past had a long run. It saw Australian history as largely a success. While the convict era was a source of shame or unease, nearly everything that came after was believed to be pretty good. There is a rival view, which I call the Black Armband view of history. In recent years it has assailed the optimistic view of history. The black armbands were quietly worn in official circles in 1988. The multicultural folk busily preached their message that until they arrived much of Australian history was a disgrace. The past treatment of Aborigines, of Chinese, of Kanakas, of non-British migrants, of women, the very old, the very young, and the poor was singled out, sometimes legitimately, sometimes not.... The Black Armband view of history might well represent the swing of the pendulum from a position that had been too favourable, too self congratulatory, to an opposite extreme that is even more unreal and decidedly jaundiced”.


With respect to our study of followship and hermeneutics, our investigation must come to terms with the way the gospel stories become a part of the collective memory of the discipleship community, and then in turn become stories of community formation. How do these stories inform our understanding of followship in our own context? What happens when competing formation stories come into conflict?

### 8.2.1 Hebraic Narrative Memory.

The call to follow Jesus is an integral part of the Gospel narratives. The written Gospels are narratives of followship that repeat the call to follow for all who would dare to read them. The four canonical Gospels are also epistemologically located within an ancient oral tradition that reaches back through several millennia of narrative remembrance and mythological formation. To remember the ways and works of YHWH encompasses much more than mimicking recitals of primordial pericopes, creeds and liturgies. Instead it entails the embodiment of ritual and the personification of story.¹⁰⁰

Within the Hebrew tradition of story telling, it is not only the narrative construct itself that is remembered, but also the existential reality of the story that is conjoined with those who have ears to hear. As such, to respond to the call to follow is to find one’s place in a grand narrative that has been told since time immemorial, and provocatively recalls the adventures of a wandering Aramean.¹¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ John 1:14 - Καὶ ὁ λόγος σώρε ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν. “And the word became flesh, and pitched a tent in our midst.” (author’s translation).
¹¹⁰¹ Deuteronomy 26:5.
It is in the telling of stories that the salvation-history of Israel was remembered to each generation. Miroslav Volf suggests that, “We are not just shaped by memories; we ourselves shape the memories that shape us.” The same can be said of the collective memory of the people of Israel, who were given a divine mandate to remember and a warning against forgetfulness. Volf reminds us that every act of confession is an act of remembering, and for the Jewish people, their identity was one defined by remembering well. For the stories they remembered, stories of creation and destiny, deliverance and liberation, covenant and promise, and the way they remembered them, through public worship and communal rituals, were constitutive for their sense of belonging and purpose in the world, and became a hermeneutic by which all other stories were measured and interpreted. In this way, Volf suggests, narrative re-membering is a process of salvation.

The God of Israel was a god of story, not a god of philosophical abstraction. Imagined by mythic narrative and proclaimed through prophetic remembrance, the great divine identifiers of the Hebraic sacred text (‘I am the Lord your God’), were embedded in narrative form (‘who brought you forth

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1102 For a connection between remembering and imitation see Hauerwas, S., in Berkman, J. and Cartwright, M., (ed), *The Hauerwas Reader*, Duke University Press, London, 2001, p. 122. (Referred to as HR from here on.) “To remember the works of Yahweh and to seek him, i.e., to let one’s acts be determined by his will, is in reality the same. Consequently, to ‘remember’ the ‘Way’ from the Reed Sea onwards is to act now on the basis of the relationship between God and Israel there revealed, and in doing so to appropriate it, and know it to be real.” (Hauerwas quoting E. J. Tinsley).

1103 Volf, *EM op. cit.*, Kindle Location 290.

1104 Volf, *EM op. cit.*, Kindle location 1045. “Only in Israel, and nowhere else, is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people.”

1105 Volf, *EM op. cit.*, Kindle location 309-278. Volf identifies four ways in which memory can act as a pathway to salvation: healing, acknowledgment, solidarity, protection.

1106 For further support of this idea see also Amos, N. Wilder, *Jesus’ Parables and the War of Myths: Essays on Imagination in the Scriptures*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1982, p. 55. See also Metz, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

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from the land of Egypt’);\textsuperscript{1107} YHWH was remembered as the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel. As such, it was the story of YHWH’s encounter and relationship with the nation of Israel that provided both the framework and indeed the language of Hebrew theology.\textsuperscript{1108}

For the Hebrew people, mythos and ethos were inseparable and the language of narrative itself constituted a house of being.\textsuperscript{1109} In terms of Hebrew theology, this world-view resulted in a primacy of narrative over doctrine.\textsuperscript{1110}

For a religious culture so captive to legal requirements and ecclesial interpretations, the place of narrative was surprisingly paramount: it was the narrative of Moses on the Mount that gave authority to the Decalogue, and it was the story of YHWH’s journey with Abraham that gave rise to the importance of covenant.\textsuperscript{1111}

This Hebraic understanding of theological narrative memory, however, stands in stark contrast to the foundational contribution of Hellenistic rationality to Christian theology. First century Greco-Roman epistemology was a collaborative synthesis of philosophical teachings from Socrates to Aristotle.

\textsuperscript{1107}Leviticus 25:38.
\textsuperscript{1108}See also Ricoeur, P., \textit{Oneself as Another}, p. 148. “It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.”
\textsuperscript{1109}Wilder, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 55. See also Brueggemann, W., \textit{Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy}, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1997. (Referred to as TOT from here on.) In particular, pp. 122-126. Brueggemann talks in terms of Israel’s normative testimony, and he unpacks this notion of testimony in terms of grammar, sentence structure and syntax. For Brueggemann, the normative testimony of Israel can be broken down to a simple narrative form that contains a verb, object and subject. The shape of this testimony posits YHWH (object) as being active (verb) in the formation of Israel/creation/the nations etc (subject).
\textsuperscript{1110}See in particular Cupitt, \textit{LL, op. cit.}, p. 134-139.
along with such diverse belief-praxis systems as Stoicism, Gnosticism, and the Empirical cult. Within this disparate conglomeration of philosophical ideas and religious belief systems, however, a common epistemological hermeneutic emerged: the power of story became subsumed by the power of principle. The epic adventures of Homer and Hesiod were replaced by the philosophical abstractions of Plato and Aristotle. Hence, one of the repercussions for an emerging Christian theology in conversation with a Greco-Roman world was that narrative ceased to be a primary epistemological identifier, and instead the rationality of a Hellenistic philosophical paradigm began to shape Christian belief and praxis.

8.2.2 Narrative, Symbol and Meaning.

As a consequence of this shift in epistemological paradigms, Christian theology has at times been preoccupied with the extraction of moral principles or doctrinal statements and creeds from the Biblical narratives. This has resulted in a somewhat exclusivist determination of the Christian faith. Within a Christendom paradigm, where every good citizen is essentially a Christian, this does not necessarily create too much tension. It is the non-citizen who is

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1112 For a quick overview of some of the philosophical systems that were operating in first century Hellenism see Mark Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace and Community*, Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 2000, pp. 23-48.

1113 See Cupitt, *WS*, op. cit., pp. 39-44, who compares the parallel and oppositional epistemological traditions within Christianity of *Muthos* and *Logos*. Also Hans W. Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, Oxford, University Press, 1993, in particular pp. 94-116, where Frei critiques the theological methodology of post-enlightenment rationalism. And Ricoeur, *TN*, op. cit. Ricoeur investigates the relational circle between the historical investigation of temporal experience and the expression that gives this experience meaning in narrative form. The significance of this work in relation to the discussion at hand is that Ricoeur reveals that narrative is the primary vehicle of human meaning, and as such, it is an epistemological paradigm that needs to be recovered.
demonised and outcast. In a post-Christendom era, however, where the assurance of salvation is no longer tied to citizenship and empire, a hermeneutic of belonging has developed whereby the criteria of church membership are reduced to doctrinal adherence.\(^{1114}\) Thus, in order to be Christian, one must behave in a certain way, or confess a certain belief. In this way, the Biblical narratives are merely seen as a theological source from which doctrine is extracted.\(^{1115}\) Once extracted, however, these doctrines gain a life of their own, far removed from the narrative construct within which they were clothed. Such principles are seen as the moral or essence of the story and, in turn, become a rationalised and somewhat reductionist replacement of the narrative itself.\(^{1116}\)

Principles extracted from narrative also function as symbols. Ricoeur provocatively reminds us: the symbol gives rise to thought.\(^{1117}\) But when symbol is dislocated from narrative, its surplus of meaning is subject to interpretative arbitrariness and contextual relativity to the extent of profound meaninglessness: the symbol of the broken bread in the Eucharistic meal,


\(^{1116}\) See also Hauerwas, *HR*, op. cit., p. 166. Contrary to the assumption of many philosophers, moral principles do not serve as the “essence” of stories, as if they might be extracted from the story and still convey the same meaning. Rather, our principles are but shorthand reminders necessary for moral education and explanation; their moral significance is contained in stories.

when removed from the narrative that informs its meaning, is simply the product of wheat and water.\textsuperscript{1118}

Not only does symbol give rise to thought, but it is also our thinking that constantly returns us to the very notion of symbols. Readers of symbolic text tend to both demythologise what is written in relation to their own interpretative paradigm, and then in turn supplant (remythologise?) given symbols for metaphorical replacements that are more coherent with their own context. It is in terms of metaphor that the extent of symbolic meaning is realised, for we understand metaphor not only in relation to what a certain thing is like, but also with respect to what it is not.

(M)etaphor plays an important part in Ricoeur's hermeneutical thinking, because it demonstrates how language works and meaning is created. Ricoeur sees metaphor not merely as a trope or figure of speech, but a semantic device that bears meaning which could not be expressed in any other ways. It serves as an example for the way in which meaning arises. In metaphor, two elements are combined that do not make sense together at the literal level. This leads to a creative tension between the two elements of the metaphor. They shed light on each other and relationships of meaning applying to one element are brought into relation with the other.\textsuperscript{1119}

Yet as soon as we return to the symbol/metaphor dialectic, we have returned to narrative, for it is only in narrative form that metaphors are enacted: the broken bread becomes a symbol, and, surpassing its utilitarian banality, a

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\textsuperscript{1118} For a confronting example of this, see Bucher, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 75. Michael Ley argues that the National Socialist movement in Germany replaced the Christian Eucharist with the extermination of Jews as a religious sacrifice. “The Eucharist, however, is no longer carried out symbolically, National Socialist religion practices the ritual in reality; the human sacrifice is carried out in the extermination facilities. This sacrifice is simultaneously an expiatory offering and intended as a new creation.”
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\textsuperscript{1119} Jensen, A., \textit{op. cit.}, Kindle location: 3396.
\end{flushright}
metaphor for the divine, when it is located within the narrative of the Last Supper.\textsuperscript{1120}

It is with this in mind that Johann Baptist Metz talks of the need for the church to recover its dangerous memory.\textsuperscript{1121} For Metz the concept of \textit{memoria}, encapsulates the eschatological memory of the church that threatens the very nature of the present and calls it into question because it “remembers a future that is still outstanding”.\textsuperscript{1122} This memory is embodied and enacted through what Metz refers to as Christian formulae (doctrine and symbol as utilised in the theological praxis of the church) and is, in effect, the very Christian faith of the church. Faith, in this regard, is not so much concerned with the supposed subjective decision making process of the individual believer, as it is with the content and conviction of the ecclesial community’s gospel consciousness and societal critique. So, according to Metz, it is the doctrinal formulae of the Christian community, derived from the metaphors and symbolics of the narrative tradition, that provide an articulation of faith and a lens through which to view the world.

Metz’s understandings of memory and formulae, however, need to be held alongside one another in creative tension. The formulae that Metz refers to, if they are indeed birthed from the community’s collective memory, must not be allowed to supplant the concept of narrative as one of theological and ontological primacy. For memory itself is part of story, and just as each story has a beginning, it also has an ending. It is precisely this promise of ending

\textsuperscript{1120} McClendon, \textit{BT}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 77. McClendon uses the example of the Lord’s Supper as a way of understanding how image/metaphor informs faith. This image/metaphor is only given meaning, however, because of the narrative that creates the image. See also Jensen, A., \textit{op. cit.}, Kindle location: 3414.

\textsuperscript{1121} Metz, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 200-204.

\textsuperscript{1122} Metz, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 200. See also Volf, \textit{EM op. cit.}, Kindle Reader Location 1086-1094.
that necessarily invades the present. The power of the Christian story as a
dangerous memory is that it demands an eschatological response to the
present because its foretold ending awaits to be evoked.

While James McClendon has much in common with Metz’s approach, he
prefers to speak of images rather than symbols. McClendon, drawing
upon the work of Wittgenstein, suggests that the church needs to rediscover a
hermeneutic that incorporates Wittgenstein’s previously discussed picture
thinking. Images of faith are the very substance of religion and
McClendon insists we need to apply them “as the makers of Scripture applied
them – to ourselves”. Between such images and the events that create,
inform and interpret them, there is a relational and indeed ontological
connection that is articulated most clearly through narrative. Where symbol
and image may fail because of their interpretative ambiguity, narrative is much
more directive. It is not that narrative negates the necessity of symbolic
interpretation, but rather that it qualifies it. With narrative, the reader must not
only answer to the rational demands of interpretative objectivity, but also
surrender to the seduction of an existential subjectivity; narrative requires the
reader to become a part of the story itself.

In this regard, Amos Wilder’s understanding of symbolic imagination is also
germane. For Wilder, the symbolics of Jesus need to be intentionally
contrasted with what is usually understood by the word symbolism. Wilder’s

1123 McClendon, BT, op. cit., p. 72.
1124 McClendon makes much use of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, which attempts to re-
envision and reframe the commonalities of life. Picture thinking, for the purposes of our
usage, will be defined as an acknowledgement of the informative priority of images and their
interpretation in the processes of faith actualisation and praxis.
1125 McClendon, BT, op. cit., p. 74.
1126 Wilder, op. cit., p. 103.
use of the term symbolics refers to much more than the perceived meaning of a particular symbol. Instead, it necessarily entails a socio-psychological dimension of interpretation and a collection of deeper determinates that have shaped the image of the symbol and lent it power. For Wilder, the symbolics of the New Testament do not only dramatize and interpret the gospel, they participate within it. With this in mind, I would argue that meaning is not contained in symbols, nor necessarily by the people who seek to interpret them. In fact, meaning cannot be contained at all. Rather meaning is engaged in the encounter between a symbol’s story and the story of the community who seeks to interpret it. And so it is with the followship imperative. As followers engage with the story of Christ and the call to follow, through Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic of the Incarnate One, the Crucified One and the Resurrected One, they encounter new meaning in relation to their existential reality, and a new future as they draw on ancient memory.

8.3 Developing a Narrative Ethic of Followship

Unfortunately the relationship between story and symbol, narrative and doctrine, is not one that has been rightly understood throughout the history of the church. Since the Enlightenment, the primordial narratives that have

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birthed our theological questioning, culminating in such critical dogmas as the incarnation and atonement, have been dismissed as primitive mythology and, as such, have resulted in an epistemological dislocation between our primary narrative sources and our doctrinal conclusions.¹¹²⁸ Rather than understanding narrative as a mineral-rich land source from which doctrine can be mined and extracted, I believe that we should instead view the sacred texts of the Christian faith as a plot of land within which our doctrinal beliefs may be planted and allowed to grow.

Stories cannot merely be reduced to their educational or entertainment value: they are not material assets to be exploited. Rather, they incorporate a gestalt far more intricate and wonderful – stories are indeed the very soul of community. For this reason, Jesus primarily sought to proclaim the rule and reign of God and the call of followship through the medium of story telling, not purely as a pedagogical aid, but as a mediation of life.¹¹²⁹ It is at the heart of humankind’s understanding of life-experience¹¹³⁰ that the power of story becomes most evident, not only in the articulation of our values and beliefs, but also in their pragmatic realization.

Accordingly, the everyday praxis of the Christian faith is often reduced to the ethical dialectic of situation and principle as the primary basis for decision-

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¹¹²⁹ Wilder, op. cit., p. 72.
making. Traditionally, formulae informing ethical discourse concentrate upon the options available when faced with hard choices; about choosing the right solution to a given problem. In this way, however, ethics is reduced to a hypothetical equation pertaining to the outcome of an interaction between x and y, rather than about people’s lives.\textsuperscript{1131} Instead of a preoccupation with the theoretical dialectics of principle ethics, an ethics of followship informed by the gospel narratives is primarily concerned with notions of conviction rather than principle.\textsuperscript{1132} A principle is something that you have; a conviction is something that has you. Whereas people are often willing to invest money on opinions and reputations upon principles, it is lives that are staked upon conviction.\textsuperscript{1133}

An ethic of followship, narrative ethics, is tied to story, and is thus more concerned with integrity and faithfulness, than principle or outcome.\textsuperscript{1134} It is narrative that both locates and informs ethics. Ethical dilemmas pertaining to such difficult and complex theoretically manufactured dichotomies as human rights and cultural exploitation, terrorism and the demand for political liberation, abortion and the sanctity of life, are not about conflicting

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1131] Hauerwas and Jones, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 163.
\item[1132] See also McClendon, \textit{BT, op. cit.}, p. 21, Theology should be about the study of convictions. “Theology may have to acknowledge that a theology of revelation or of reason, or a theology of secularity or of religiosity, if it does not enter into the shape of the lives of the people in its community of concern, is after all irrelevant to these lives.”
\item[1133] See also McClendon, \textit{BT, op. cit.}, p. 20, and Isasi-Díaz, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 123, who with reference to Latina theology writes, “People do not live or die for a creed, for this or that belief. Large-scale changes such as those that make liberation possible, which necessitate changes of the heart as well as changes of the mind, are not really possible on the grounds of reason alone. People need a story. A story puts sinews and flesh on the dry bones of reason and creed.”
\item[1134] See also Hauerwas, \textit{HR, op. cit.}, p. 170. Hauerwas qualifies the relationship between stories and principles. “Even though moral principles are not sufficient in themselves for our moral existence, neither are stories sufficient if they do not generate principles that are morally significant. Principles without stories are subject to perverse interpretation (i.e. they can be used in immoral stories), but stories without principles will have no way of concretely specifying the actions and practices consistent with the general orientation expressed by the story.”
\end{footnotes}
understandings of moral certitude, but rather conflicting stories\textsuperscript{1135} of life-experience and the result of a naïve indifference to narrative hermeneutics. In the end we all live, breathe, pray, follow and make decisions within a narrative paradigm. The ethical dilemma that we ultimately face is to name the narrative that predominantly informs our existence, and to respond accordingly. Ethics then, is not about decision-making, but narrative participation.

The principles, ethics and doctrines that we glean from the Biblical narratives are meant to be understood as signposts\textsuperscript{1136} that lead us back to story, in order that we would truly re-member. Ethical and doctrinal statements are not created in an existential vacuum. A specific story may not be acknowledged or even recognised in relation to a particular statement, but it exists all the same. The story behind any such statement may include reference to an implied author, reader, or characters, or to those who may seemingly be onlookers and incidental to the narrative itself. But a story is greater than its characters, more complex than a linear representation of its plot, and more meaningful than the moral it suggests. One can no more translate story into doctrine, than poetry into prose.\textsuperscript{1137}

The stories (parables) that Jesus told were about everyday life – no miracles, only mundane existence. In fact the one parable (Luke 16:19-31) where God is called upon for a miracle, divine intervention is rejected. And yet there was

\textsuperscript{1135} See also Hauerwas and Jones, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 169. And Cupitt, \textit{WS}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 20. History is a “contest of stories”.

\textsuperscript{1136} See also Metz, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 201, who talks of the ecclesial traditions of doctrine and confession as formulae of memoria. And Cupitt, \textit{WS}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 14, suggests that, “(l)\textsuperscript{n the telling, the story is an unfolding syntagmatic chain of signs.”

\textsuperscript{1137} Hauerwas, \textit{HR}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 167. “For poetry does not just describe the known; it reveals dimensions of the unknown that make the known seem unfamiliar.”
something miraculous about the way Jesus’ stories imparted wonder and awakened dangerous imaginings amongst his listeners about the possibilities of a different world; one where the rule and reign of God defined reality. Jesus’ parables were not meant to impart doctrinal beliefs or moral principles. Rather, they were a call to action to participate in the great adventure of God’s activity in the world: “Jesus’ speech had the character not of instruction and ideas but of compelling imagination, of spell, of mythical shock and transformation”.

8.3.1 Towards a Subjective Narrative Participation

The gospel stories passed down through the Hebrew oral tradition to the written canon are not undecoded fables awaiting a moralistic translation, or a collection of Gnostic sayings requiring demythologising. In fact, rather than requiring interpretation from narrative to principle, the gospels are in actuality narrative interpretations of Jesus himself. The whole point of the Gospel narrative is not to invite the scholarly scrutiny of objective distance, but rather to demand of the reader a subjective participation.

This notion of subjective participation, within the gospel narrative itself, is a meeting place between the often-perceived dialectic of faith and action. In terms of a narrative of followship, however, I wish to examine this tension as it

1138 Wilder, op. cit., p. 83.
1139 Ricoeur, P., * Oneself as Another*, p. 21. Paul Ricoeur refers to this idea of subjective participation in reference to what he perceives as a widening gap between a desired verifiable objective certainty associated with *cogito philosophies* (Descartes: I think therefore I am) and the notion of *attestation*: a testimony of belief.
1140 See also McClendon, *BT*, op. cit., p. 65, who talks of the meeting place between faith and action in the life of Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Compare also to the discussion in chapter one relating to the dialectic of grace and works.
pertains to the correlation between narrative and acting: narrative comes alive when it is acted upon. The narrative of God as it unfolds in the sacred texts of the Christian faith, is a theo-drama\textsuperscript{1141} waiting to be acted upon and within – waiting to be fulfilled. And, as with all good drama, the theatre of God as it is transcribed by the gospel accounts, is more than a theological script being enacted. Instead it is an invitation, no a demand, for participatory discourse and interaction. There are no observers here, no neutral agents, only those who freely choose to participate by responding to the call to follow – those who are coerced by the power of the narrative itself; and those who participate by their refusal to follow.

Samuel Wells’ theory of ethics as improvisation has much to offer at this point.\textsuperscript{1142} Wells begins his project by outlining the difference between Hegel’s notions of the epic, the lyric, and the dramatic.\textsuperscript{1143} The epic perspective in relation to narrative is that which seeks to be objective: it is detached and informative and comprehensive. The lyric perspective is one that celebrates its subjectivity: it is personal and biased and emotive. The dramatic perspective is a synthesis of the epic and the lyric: it is objective, because the script is external to the actor; it is subjective because the actor must embody and interpret the script as it comes alive.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Theodrama is also a term utilised by the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. Balthasar’s aesthetic methodology develops a far-reaching analogous reading of the created universe through a hermeneutic lens of the dramatic that begins with Christology and then permeates throughout his systematic agenda. For an introductory guide to the body of Balthasar’s five volume series on Theo-Drama, see Nichols, A., \textit{No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Dramatics}, The Catholic University of American Press, Washington, 2000.
\item Wells, \textit{op. cit.}
\item Wells, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Wells then seeks to develop a larger schema through which the theo-drama of God is understood to take place. Drawing on models suggested previously by Balthasar and Wright, he postulates that the theo-drama of God is a Five Act Play: “Act One is creation, Act Two is Israel, Act Three is Jesus, Act Four is the church, Act Five is the eschaton”. The followship imperative takes place in Act Four. There are three acts that have gone before and there is a final act that concludes the drama. Followship is a performance. The followship imperative demands a performance of faith, an actualization of spiritual belief. The gospel narratives become a script for followers to enact within their own context. A script that seems very clear and directive is some ways, and ambiguous an open-ended in others.

It is in this regard that Augusto Boal’s coinage of the term spect-actor is most helpful. A spect-actor is someone who sees (Latin: spec), and by doing so identifies with the hermeneutical process of discerning and interpreting; and one who actively participates within the drama unfolding before them (actor). To become a spect-actor is to move beyond a hermeneutic of suspicion to what Dorothee Sölle describes as a ‘hermeneutic of hunger’. It is to privilege the physical text above the written text and to

1144 Wells, op. cit., p. 30.
1145 Wells, op. cit., p. 40. “Performance does justice to the embodied, communal way in which the church tries to involve itself in the life enjoined by the Scripture while remaining faithful to the character of God that emerges from the Biblical witness.”
1147 See also Barth’s criticism of Harnack’s theology as “spectator theology” as cited in H. Martin Rumscheidt, Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923, Cambridge, University Press, 1972, p. 34.
1148 For a brief introduction to the concept of a hermeneutic of suspicion see Myers, C., Binding the Strongman: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1988, pp. 4-5. (Referred to as BS from here on). For a more detailed analysis see Segundo, J. L., The Liberation of Theology, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1977, pp. 7-38.
1149 See also Sölle, D., The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2001, p. 45. My use of the term here is different to Sölle, who utilises the idea of a hermeneutic of hunger in relation to mysticism. My use of the term signifies moving beyond
move beyond an intellectual consent with the text to an existential co-habitation of body, mind and soul with the written narrative, such that it becomes an embodied narrative. This process of existential solidarity with the written text is one whereby the written story comes alive in the reader. The life-context of the written narrative is superimposed upon the life-context of the reader, to the extent that the life-choices faced by the characters in the story are engaged with respect to the life-choices of the reader. Becoming a spect-actor is to intentionally overcome the inherent disempowerment of the text. The reading event then, is not something that happens to you as a reader, but rather something that occurs within you as a participant. Cupitt also understands stories to be interactive with our own experience:

(s)tories actually produce desires and patterns of behaviour. They teach us and equip us with selves to be, feelings to have, actions to perform, people to meet, games to play, and a world to inhabit.... Stories then provide us internally with a functioning economics of selfhood, and externally with a theatrics of the life-world and the various parts that we are going to be playing in it. The self as a self-regulating system is made by stories, and the dramas of everyday life in which it plays its various roles are also scripted by stories. The wisdom of the great scriptural faiths was to understand how profoundly scripted our lives are.  

Returning to Wells, we discover that even though the performance of followship can be understood as part of a grand theo-drama of five acts, it is as though the script for Act Four has gone missing. The narrative is well

the hermeneutical circle of theory and critique that asks the question why?, and instead engaging with life-texts that dare to ask what now?  
1150 See also Auslander P., in Schutzman, M., and Cohen-Cruz, J., (ed), Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 130. Auslander suggests that Augusto Boal's notion of spect-actor privileges the physical text over the verbal text.  
established, we know what has gone before, we know what comes after, but
the roles of the actors in Act Four require a certain amount of improvisation.

When improvisers are trained to work in the theatre, they are schooled in a tradition so thoroughly that they learn to act from habit in ways appropriate to the circumstance. This is exactly the goal of theological ethics… Improvisation is inevitable. When Christians… gather together and try to discern God’s hand in events and his will for their future practice, they are improvising, whether they are aware of it or not they – almost invariably – accord authority to Scripture, and generally to some other forms of discernment, perhaps tradition, or reason, or experience, or something similar. These provide the boundaries of their performance, their stage as it were. And on this stage they strive to enact a faithful drama… (Im)provisation is the only term that adequately describes the desire to cherish a tradition without being locked in the past.¹¹⁵²

In order to improvise well, actors must know the story to which they belong, they must know the boundaries of the narrative-world they embody, and they must have confidence in the actors with whom they share a scene. Act Four is not a monologue, and improvised dialogue can be difficult to negotiate at times. There is room for nuance and plot twists, within reason, and at times there may need to be narrative ‘corrections’ to bring the story back on track. The art of improvisation needs rehearsal and training; the improvisation of followship needs a community of faithful followers; and the Holy Scriptures of the followship community provide a grand narrative waiting to come alive.

¹¹⁵² Wells, op. cit., p. 43. See also Budden C., Following Jesus in Invaded Space: Doing theology on Aboriginal Land, Pickwick Publications, Eugene. 2009, p. 79. Budden provides a Good analogy about improvising in relation to Christian Ethics and improvisation in Jazz music. "When we listen to a person improvising, it may appear that one can simply play what one likes, making up things along the way. But improvisation is a much more difficult task, for the musician who is improvising is bound by the chord structure played by the other musicians and by the need to bring the piece ‘into land’ at the right stage, creating releasing points of tension. The improvising musician has been endless practice learned patterns of notes that fit both the chord structure and the pattern of the music, and out of that deep sense of what has been learned is able to improvise appropriate music."
This active synergy of text, narrative and participation is beautifully realised in the picture book, *The Snow Friends*. The story tells of Little Pig who loves to read. One day he finds three new words in a book he is reading. The first is ‘wish’, the second is ‘change’ and the third is ‘friend’. Little Pig realises that words do not exist in and of themselves so he closes his eyes and decides to try them out: “I wish for a change and a friend,” he said to himself.

By doing so, Little Pig has transformed three dislocated words, placing them in narrative form. They now have a contextual gestalt greater than their individual definitions. And the collective meaning they embody has the existential investment of the one who has narrated them. Little Pig has taken ownership of the three words – they have now become his words.

The story continues: “The wish worked. It started to snow. And that was a nice change.” Little Pig’s syntax conversion from text to narrative is directly attributed to a change in the weather – a nice change. As isolated words, wish and change have no power; in narrative form they help transform Little Pig’s world. This is not to suggest that it would not have snowed anyway, but rather from the perspective of Little Pig’s worldview, “the wish worked”. For Little Pig, the wish and the change are connected, because they are more than individual words – they help form the narrative of which Little Pig is an active participant. Little Pig goes on to make a friend (a snowman – one who is etiologically enabled by the change in weather and thus is ontologically connected with Little Pig’s wish), and in doing so becomes the fulfilling agent of the narrative that he has created. The connection between text, narrative

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1153 Whybrow, I., and Beeke, T., *The Snow Friends*, Gulllane, London, 2001. I am gratefully indebted to Kathryn Hobson for introducing me to the vast pedagogical potential found in what is traditionally thought of as children’s literature.
and action is found in the personhood (pighood?) of Little Pig. Little Pig becomes the interpretation of his own story.

In the same way, we are to become the interpretations of the Gospel narratives. Rather than approaching the Biblical texts as a means to an end, we must instead begin to see that we are the means to an end already found in God’s story of followship as articulated in the gospels. The followship stories of the gospels insist upon calling us, interpreting us, and demanding of us a response of narrative participation, rather than sitting idly on a bookshelf awaiting critique at our personal discretion. Such is the power of story that even at those moments when we congratulate ourselves as being the author of our own destiny, the stories we tell keep re-creating us, that we may fulfil the narratives of our own making. It is the stories we tell that author us.

This idea that we are formed by narrative is understood by Ricoeur to be a dialectic between selfhood and sameness. Identity is recognized as the way our characteristics and qualities are the same as another person or thing (sameness), or the way our characteristics and qualities are different to another person or thing (selfhood). Sameness is not selfhood. To be the same as one thing or person may also at the same time indicate being different to another. Sameness can be understood as both quantifiable (numerical identity: oneness rather than plurality) or qualitative (extreme resemblance to another). Selfhood on the other hand denotes the way identity belongs to an individual as oneself and not another. Identity understood in terms of sameness thus becomes an exercise in approximation,

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1154 Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, op. cit., p. 21.
1155 Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, op. cit., p. 116.
and the idea of selfhood becomes an exercise in differentiation. But Ricoeur also asserts that selfhood may refer to the identity of oneself as another. This process occurs through narrative participation. Our understanding of self is thus informed by the world of stories we inhabit and the subsequent characters therein – those we approximate and those who are different to us. In this way narrative identity becomes the primary way we seek to understand our notion of selfhood. And as we shall see, narrative identity is not only formed by the stories we tell, but also by the way we tell them.

8.3.2 Telling the story of Followship

To better understand the relationship between narrative and followship our focus now turns to story telling. In particular, the dialectic between the narrative, and what I will refer to as the ‘narrative act’. The ‘narrative act’ is the very process of telling a story, for it is in the telling of a story that the primordial interpretation of the story takes place.

In his own investigation of the narrative act, Henry Macdonald draws upon a parallel between the relationship of narrative and telling, on the one hand, and Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle in physics, on the other. Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle indicates that the precision of the measurement of a particle’s position is inversely proportional to the precision of the measurement of the same particle’s momentum. The reason for this is two-fold: firstly, the acquisition of the information measured (the very act of measuring a particle’s position necessarily alters the particle’s momentum,

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and vice versa); and secondly, in our understanding of the nature of matter and energy itself (matter and energy is understood to be analogous to both a ‘wave’ or a ‘particle’, but never both at the same time). Contrary to popular misconception, however, Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle is not contingent upon the method of measurement, or even the equipment used, but rather on the very conceptions by which we think and act.\footnote{Macdonald, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.}

In the same way that Wittgenstein’s ‘duck/rabbit’ investigation resulted in a distinction between ‘seeing as’ and interpretation, Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle represents for us an example of the distinction between how we quantifiably measure and qualitatively interpret data. The process of how we know things can never be separated from the very thing we seek to know, and at times the process itself transforms the content of our knowledge. In relation to narratology, this correlates to what McDonald refers to as the principle of ‘narrative uncertainty’.

And so it is with the concepts which we apply to fictional narratives. Like position and momentum in physics, these concepts, story and narrative act, have the same empirical basis in the text, yet are incommensurate logically. The principle of narrative uncertainty expresses such incommensurability as follows: the more definite our account of story or plot, the more indefinite our account of the narrative act. The narrative act is what constructs or makes, in part, the story, and the more we take that story as finished and whole, assigning to it a fixed and reliable meaning, the more we interfere with and "change the values of" what constitutes the narrative act. What constitutes the narrative act is the process of constructing or making the story. In so far as interpretation produces "meaning," it produces that which is radically incommensurate with a process or "action." For meaning, like the position of a particle, must be described in atemporal terms, whereas action, like a wave, must be described temporally... It follows that any interpretation of the story will interfere, although not necessarily to an equal degree, with and change the values of the narrative act by "freezing" the latter at a certain point. By producing, through our interpretations, a "still shot"
of the narrative act, we impose an invariant intention on what is in most cases a variable process.  

So, in Wittgensteinian terms, the very study of language, existing as it does within language, is part of an existing language game, rather than some sort of objective measurement external to it. This act of study, in and of itself, necessarily effects the results or findings we hope to ascertain. “Logic is not a type of explanation; it cannot be stated but only shown (which is why Wittgenstein implores us, “Don’t think, but look!”).”  

If there is truth here with respect to our study of story-telling and narrative, there are also implications for our understanding in relation to narrative and followship: the way discipleship narratives are told is inversely proportional to the propositional foundationalism of the community that tells them.

In other words, I propose that where the narratives of scripture are seen as dynamic and living, rather than static and contextually obtuse, the telling of these stories (the narrative act) has a greater formative potency. When the Biblical stories of followship are contextualized to the community that seeks to tell the story, and re-contextualized to the community that seeks to receive the story, the very acts of telling (and receiving) become an interpretation of the story itself. It is in the telling and receiving of discipleship stories that the following of Christ is both enacted and enabled.

This practice of enacting and enabling the story of Christ finds potency through a process that Ricoeur calls *attestation*: a testimony of trust and

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1158 Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 3. See also Lindbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 66.  
Attestation finds meaning in the grammar of statements such as ‘I believe in’, rather than the foundational certitude implied in the grammar of statements such as, ‘I believe that’. In this way the attestation of selfhood indicates a belief in oneself. Through this idea of self-belief, Ricoeur indicates that there also emerges the possibility of belief in ‘the other’. For the same story that enables the attestation of the self, also creates the other. Thus to believe in the very story that creates a sense of selfhood, is also to believe in the need for responsibility towards the other. Attestation leads to responsibility.

Bonhoeffer also believed the telling and receiving of discipleship narratives was interpreted through a hermeneutic lens of responsibility and deputyship: we tell and receive the story of Christ ‘for others’. Even though the existential location of our telling and receiving of the story of Christ will differ dramatically in time and space, the direction we follow has an existential consistency, albeit not in temporal terms, but rather eschatologically. In other words, the way we tell and receive the story of Christ must always be for the well-being of others, and in doing so, it must also be a celebration of the kingdom of God: a kingdom of justice, peace and love. In this way, the telling and receiving of the story of Christ is always an ethical act: there is no neutrality or objectivity in story-telling. And each responsible telling and re-telling, whether it be in a lecture room at Finkenwalde, or a prison cell in Tegel, is in itself an

1160 Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, op. cit., p. 21.
existential participation in the life of the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One.  

From Christ’s sacrifice we recognize deputyship as the law of life for all men; it is the mark of what it means to be human. The one who is free to die, free to be a deputy unto death for his brother, is the one who is free to live. Bonhoeffer sees not only the fulfillment of the individual, but of all forms of human community, including the nation, in the willingness to act vicariously for others.  

We conclude with an example as controversial as it is incisive. For many, Bonhoeffer’s involvement in the attempted assassination of Hitler has seemed incongruent with his insistence upon a hermeneutic of realized Christology in his approach to ethics. And yet, for Bonhoeffer, it was this very hermeneutic that gave impetus to his involvement in the underground movement of resistance. Bonhoeffer’s understanding of followship demanded an allegiance to the way of Christ that was mediated by a correspondence with reality, in opposition to the idolatrous notion of seeking to do the absolute good. Bonhoeffer was acutely aware that the call of Christ is in the world and, as such, is incarnated into reality; thus the call of Christ is a call to reality, not from it.

Action which is in accordance with Christ is in accordance with reality because it allows the world to be the world; it reckons with the world as the world; and yet it never forgets that in Jesus Christ the world is loved, condemned and reconciled by God.  

1163 For a very thorough analysis on this issue see Rasmussen, *op. cit.*
Bonhoeffer’s involvement then, in the attempted assassination of Hitler, rightly understood, is an ethical act born out of Bonhoeffer’s telling and receiving the story of Christ. Bonhoeffer’s conduct is not so much a betrayal of his dedication to pacifism, but more a reflection of his allegiance to Christ. From an essay entitled ‘After Ten Years’ written at New Year in 1943, Bonhoeffer writes the following:

We are not Christ, but if we want to be Christians, we must have some share in Christ’s large-heartedness by acting with responsibility and in freedom when the hour of danger comes, and by showing a real sympathy that springs, not from fear, but from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer. Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian behaviour. The Christian is called to sympathy and action, not in the first place by his own sufferings, but by the suffering of his brethren, for whose sake Christ suffered.¹¹⁶⁷

We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds: we have been drenched by many storms; we have learnt the arts of equivocation and pretence; experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open; intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still of any use?¹¹⁶⁸

Who stands fast? Only the one for whom the final standard is not his reason, his principles, his conscience, his freedom, his virtue, but who is ready to sacrifice all these, when in faith and sole allegiance to God he is called to obedient and responsible action: the responsible person, whose life will be nothing but an answer to God’s question and call.¹¹⁶⁹

Bonhoeffer then, is willing to take upon himself the guilt of a nation by doing the unthinkable, answering the call of the One who demands his followship.

Before other men the man of free responsibility is justified by necessity; before himself he is acquitted by his conscience; but before God he hopes only for mercy.¹¹⁷⁰

¹¹⁶⁸ Bonhoeffer, LPP, op. cit., p. 16.
¹¹⁶⁹ Bonhoeffer, LPP, op. cit., p. 5.
¹¹⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 244. See also Rasmussen, op. cit., p. 51. “To maintain one’s innocence in a setting such as that of the Third Reich, even to the point of not plotting Hitler’s death, would be irresponsible action. To refuse to stand with others trying desperately
Chapter Nine:

Following On

Deus amat, ergo summus.
(God loves, therefore we are)\(^{1171}\)

Im Anfang war die Tat.
(In the beginning was the deed)\(^{1172}\)

The story is itself an event and has the equality of a sacred action...... it is more than a reflection – the sacred essence to which it bears witness continues to live in it. The wonder that is narrative becomes powerful once more...... A rabbi, whose grandfather had been a pupil of Baal Shem Tov, was once asked to tell a story. ‘A story ought to be told,’ he said, ‘so that it is itself a help,’ and his story was this. ‘My grandfather was paralysed. Once he was asked to tell a story about his teacher and he was told how the holy Baal Shem Tov used to jump and dance when he was praying. My grandfather stood up while he was telling the story and the story carried him away so much that he had to jump and dance to show how the master had done it. From that moment he was healed. This is how stories should be told.’\(^{1173}\)

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1173 Johann Baptist Metz quoting Martin Buber in Hauerwas and Jones, op. cit., p. 253.
The praxis of followship involves more than exemplars and words. It requires an active performance of participation. The New Testament gospels do not just tell the story of the historical Jesus in first century Palestine, they also narrate the story of followship for every time and place. These ancient stories are also contemporary ones. They are stories about Jesus, and at the same time stories about followship. Or rather, they have the potential to become stories of followship as they are enacted in the lives of followers. The task before us is to see what this looks like in practice. What does it mean to step inside the narrative of God as it is articulated within the sacred texts of the Christian tradition? What are the inevitable consequences for basing our life-choices upon a participatory reading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? In order to unpack the dilemmas before us, we will examine what followship looks like in terms of different ontological relocations: existential and eschatological. By an existential relocation, I mean to investigate what it looks like to find ourselves in an-other’s story and will examine the specific predilection for the oppressed and marginalised within the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The concept of eschatological relocation will introduce the essentiality of hope and promise to the followship praxis we are endeavouring to emulate.

1174 Block Jr., (ed), “Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theodrama: A contribution to dramatic criticism”, in Renascence, Winter 96, Vol. 48 Issue 2, pp. 152-172. The analogy between God's action and the world drama is no mere metaphor but has an ontological ground (TD I 19).
9.1 Existential Relocation: The Creative Interplay Between Text and Life

In order to better understand this notion of existential relocation, it is helpful to examine the mutuality of the relationship between reader and text within the Hebrew tradition.\textsuperscript{1175} For the reading of ancient Hebrew texts requires a special kind of participation. The written manuscript of the Hebrew language in its original forms was an unpointed text consisting only of consonants. The insertion of vowels and the necessary grammatical devices required to enable communication was effected during the vocalising of the text as it was read. The unpointed text in its original form was thus somewhat ambiguous in terms of the actual meaning of a particular word and the grammatical structure of its written phraseology. A common word such as \textit{ץֶרֶב} (‘erev) could have a variety of meanings ranging from a ‘swarm of flies’, to ‘a desert plateau’, to ‘an exchange of gifts’.\textsuperscript{1176} Such a variety of meanings and syntax within the interpretive horizon of a single written word offers an insight into how complicated the reading process must have been.

Furthermore, the Biblical narratives were primarily inherited from a wide-ranging and identity-informing\textsuperscript{1177} oral tradition passed down from generation to generation. As such, each story existed within the Hebrew community as


\textsuperscript{1176} \textit{ץֶרֶב} (‘erev) occurs 220 times in the Hebrew Bible and can have a range of meanings including a mixture, mixed company, a swarm of flies, to take on a pledge, to give a pledge, to exchange gifts, sweet, pleasing, a desert-plateau, someone who lives on a plateau, a sunset, evening, a raven (\textit{BDB}, pp. 786-788).

\textsuperscript{1177} For example, the narrative of Genesis 32 in which Jacob struggles with the unnamed assailant, is essential to the identity of the Hebrew people as a community that struggles with The Divine (\textit{יִשְׂרָאֵל}: \textit{יִשְׂרָאֵל}). See also Hauerwas, S., \textit{Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living in Between}, The Labyrinth Press, Durham, 1989, pp. 27-28. (Referred to as \textit{Existence} from here on.) Hauerwas argues against the idea that we ever choose our own identity. Instead we are created by the stories of which we are already a part.
spoken word, before it was ever a written word. It was the continuity of this oral tradition that informed and attempted to define the written word. Only as the written text was spoken was it fully realised; in the speaking of the manuscript, vowels and syntax were added, words were grouped into phrases, and meaning was assigned.

Such an event was not merely a reading of text but essentially an interpretation. It was the act of speaking forth the written word that gave the text meaning; the very breath of the assigned orator that gave the text life. The responsibility of interpretation did not rely on the reader alone. Rather, the gathered community kept the memory of the story alive in their expectation of what the narrative should be. The reader and the community of listeners of the sacred texts were part of the narratives themselves. Essentially, the telling of the story was intrinsic to the narrative itself. The Hebrew people were not merely keepers of the divine story of YHWH’s relationship with the created world; they were also participants within it, each time the story was told. The Hebrew understanding of narrative is not so much an imitation of reality, or a recollection of past events, but a discovery of life – for narrative, rather than merely being something we read, allows us to read ourselves.\footnote{Isasi-Díaz, op. cit., p. 123. See also Phan, P., “Betwixt and Between: Doing Theology with memory and Imagination”, in Phan, P., and Lee, J. L., (ed), Journeys at the Margins: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1999, p. 129. “We must ...enter into the world of the text by seeing ourselves in its stories, its plot, its characters, its rhetorical strategies, its styles, its linguistic usages. Here the text functions as a mirror in which the reader discovers himself or herself.”}

The power of narrative to emanate life is not primarily related to literary devices such as sentence structure, plot coherency, or character
development. Rather, it is found in the way we tell stories, and the way in which we experience them being told. As we share in the experience of narrative encounter, we enter into the possibility of engaging in another world outside ourselves. It is also a world connected with our own. In effect, we are the conduit between the world of the narrative and the world of our own reality. In this liminal space between worlds, the narratives we encounter become rehearsals for our own life experiences, invitations to dare to dream the impossible, and reminders of who we are. In the end, the reason we engage with stories is that they locate and orient us (even in the process of dislocation and disorientation) – there is a before and an after. Narrative provides a kind of “dense inner coherence which moves toward wider horizons with convincing logic.”

9.1.1 The Movement From Narrative Memory to Narrative Membership

Stories, then, are essentially prevenient in nature; they prepare the way before us even as they re-member to us the past. It is with this in mind that Martin Buber talks about the poetising memory of the Hebrew people, a memory that brings life to believing in the present. Peter Phan, addressing

1179 See also Cupitt, WS, op. cit., for a very helpful overview of the power and purpose of stories.
1180 See also Wilder, op. cit., p. 66.
1181 Wilder, op. cit., p. 51.
1182 This concept of recognising the before and after of the Christian Story is also picked up by Hauerwas and Willimon, op. cit., p. 52, who suggest that becoming a Christian is like jumping on a moving train. Coming to faith is not a new beginning, but rather beginning in the middle.
1183 Wilder, op. cit., p. 53.
1184 Buber, M., Kingship of God, Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1967, p. 63. “It is not fantasy active here, but memory; but precisely that believing memory of individuals and generations of early times which driven by the extraordinary occurrence, builds for it in a manner free from arbitrariness the extraordinary context – a poetising memory, but one which poetiscises believingly.”
the dislocation of migrant ethnicity and the importance of remembrance is also germane at this point.

Remembering is not reproducing reality exactly as it happened....but re-creating it imaginatively; it is re-membering disparate fragments of the past together and forming them into a new pattern under the pressure of present experiences, with the view to shaping a possible future.... Both memory and imagination in their mutual interaction are indispensable tools for theology. Without memory, theology would be empty; without imagination, it would be blind. They are the epistemological equivalents of yin and yang, ever in movement, ever transmuting into each other, ever complimenting each other, to capture reality in its wholeness.\textsuperscript{1185}

The concept of Christian followship passed down from generation to generation, is also only known through the process of remembrance: the collective remembrance of the church. There is no basic formula, no essential matrix of principle and belief that somehow articulates the substance and defining parameters of followship praxis – what there is, is a story.

Within the sacred texts of the Christian tradition, a repeated pericope\textsuperscript{1186} that locates Jesus beside the Sea of Galilee, moving among ordinary people, seeing them, and then calling them to leave everything and follow him,\textsuperscript{1187} becomes the primordial followship memory. These images of followship, of fishermen leaving their nets, of tax collectors leaving their booths, necessarily frame for the reader what followship essentially is: a response to the call the follow. But of course the images of followship portrayed in the gospel narratives are more than descriptive in nature; they are also proscriptive.

\textsuperscript{1185} Phan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{1186} In Mark’s gospel the same formula repeats itself on three different occasions (Mark 1:16-18, 19-20; 2:13-14), and is written in the present tense, because for Mark the call to discipleship is always in the now: Jesus ‘moves’ beside the Lake of Galilee, Jesus ‘sees’, Jesus ‘calls’. See also Gill, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{1187} Luke’s version pertaining to the call of the first disciples (Luke 5:11) depicts the disciples leaving everything (\textit{ἀφέντες πάντα}) to follow Jesus.
\textsuperscript{1188} Ricoeur, \textit{TN, op. cit.}, p. 174. “(W)e see images only insofar as we first hear them.”
They demand loss of life in order to find it. Followship is not merely the indicative of the Christian faith; it is also the imperative. The followship vignettes of the Gospel narratives must necessarily transcend the scribal-literary medium of erudition and hypotheses and move from image to imagination.

This movement from image to imagination, from discourse to action, is referred to by Paul Ricoeur as the ‘poetics of the will’. For Ricoeur to move beyond the written text and engage the life-text of imagined existence, the reader encounters what he calls ‘intropathy’ – that is, the ‘transfer through imagination of my here into there’. Furthermore, I would argue that to partake in the call to follow, is to imagine one’s ‘literal self’ in the place of a ‘literary other’. Just as the rule and reign of God is embodied in the personhood of Jesus Christ as a “living recapitulation of Israel’s History”, so too, the kin-dom of God is resurrected in the lives of those who existentially relocate themselves within a contextual re-telling of the gospel story. This relocation is not a matter of spiritual embodiment, as though somehow distanced from the realities of this world, but a narrative embodiment such that Jesus’ story becomes the story of Jesus’ followers. Thus, the autobasileia (the realisation of the rule and reign of God in the personhood of Jesus Christ) becomes an ekklesia-basileia – a people called to become the kin-dom.

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1189 Matthew 16:24-25.
9.1.2 From Re-membering the Past to Re-making the Present

In Christian followship, story and imagination become the essential primers to direct engagement, for “without imagination there is no action”.\(^{1193}\)

We cannot “act” ourselves into being apart from thinking and we cannot “think” ourselves into being apart from acting. This intrinsic link between thinking and acting points to the fact that we emerge as subjects from our bodies, that we do not exist like some unchanging substantial essence.\(^{1194}\)

It is at this point that we shall revisit Balthasar’s theology of theo-drama. For Balthasar scripted characters are given life through the activity of the actor. This life-giving moment is a remaking of reality.\(^{1195}\)

By pouring "one's own personal life into an [external] form of utterance" the actor or actress is responsible for giving life to the characters created by the author. But "the 'truth' of what is represented," Balthasar says, "can be defined neither as reality (the actor is not really Hamlet) nor as illusion (which presupposes a reality), but a genuine making-present".\(^{1196}\)

The gospel narratives also seek to re-make the present as they engage with the reader. The reader participates within an alternative reading of reality, an alternative hermeneutic that locates self and text within the same horizon of emerging possibilities. The reader is thus existentially relocated to a ‘hyphenated existence’\(^{1197}\) between text and context, between the mythical memory of the gospel imperative and the pragmatic politics of everyday life.

\(^{1193}\) Ricoeur, *TN*, op. cit., p. 177.
\(^{1194}\) Isasi-Díaz, op. cit., p. 125.
\(^{1196}\) Block, *op. cit.*, TD I 281.
\(^{1197}\) For a discussion on hyphenated existence see Pearson C., *Faith in a Hyphen: Cross Cultural Theologies Down Under*, Openbook Publishers, Adelaide, 2004. (Referred to as *Hyphen* from here on). See also Lee, J. Y., *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995. (Referred to as *Marginality* from here on.) In particular pp. 29-76 where Lee advocates a theology of marginality for hyphenated existence. See also p. 78, where Lee suggests the possibility of a hyphenated Jesus-Christ: Jesus as the Christ and Christ as Jesus, both human and divine.
Such a reality becomes a both/and existence, whereby text and life interplay. Jung Young Lee, in his theological description of ethnic marginality equates this hyphenated existence with the identity of Christ as being both human and divine, both a citizen of this world and a foretaste of heaven, and yet a stranger to both.

Christian disciples also experience this same liminality created by being in two differing realities – the other-worldliness of the One in whose image we are made, and the this-worldly physicality of our existence. People of the Christian faith, rightly understood, occupy a marginal existence that is not defined by readily identifiable cultural norms, or access to power, resources and status. Instead, the Christian community is a diasporic community that does not have a space of its own, but stands in solidarity in the space of the other. Thus the Christian narrative seeks to both ontologically define and incarnationally locate a group of people who become the text in its reading and read the text in their becoming.

This ‘textual diaspora’, a sense of dislocation from the Biblical text, is explained well by Phan as he addresses concerns regarding the cultural diaspora of ethnic migrants. The movement from one culture to another

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1198 Pearson C., *Hyphen, op. cit.* See also Lee, *Marginality op. cit.*, p. 49, who talks about marginality in terms of being in-both two worlds (as opposed to being in-between).
1199 Lee, *Marginality op. cit.*, p. 84. Speaking of the Jesus-Christ hyphenation, Lee suggests that (h)e no longer belonged to heaven because he left there, and he did not belong to the world because through baptism he renounced his ways.
1200 This theme of diaspora is also explored by Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 15, who suggests the metaphor of citizenship to an *altera civitas* (another city), when describing the Christian identity. The early diaspora of the Christian faith clung to an understanding of what it means to be a called people (*ekklesia* – called out) – people who belonged to God’s city (Augustine’s city of God).
provides a comparable experience to the transition that occurs when disciples enter the story of Christ.

Paradoxically, being neither this nor that allows one to be both this and that. Belonging to both worlds and cultures, marginal(ized) persons have the opportunity to fuse them together and, out of their respective resources, fashion a new different world, so that persons at the margins stand not only between these two worlds and cultures but beyond them. Thus being betwixt and between can bring about personal and societal transformation and enrichment.\textsuperscript{1202}

The space betwixt and between cultures than Phan refers to is akin to the liminal space that arises between the Biblical text and those who seek to participate in the narrative itself. And just like one culture can not be superimposed upon another, so too the Biblical narrative can not simply be relocated in its entirety from the textual world to the existential reality of the disciple. The Biblical narrative adapts to each context. Participants enact the story of Christ into their own culture, into their own language, into their own paradigm.

People do not just participate within culture; they help to create it.\textsuperscript{1203} The way we understand the confines and parameters of our own humanity is intrinsically defined by the interlocution between individual existence and the reciprocating structures of community in which we locate ourselves.\textsuperscript{1204}

Culture cannot exist without human participation and humanity cannot exist

\textsuperscript{1202} Phan, op. cit., p. 113.
\textsuperscript{1203} Pearson C., Hyphen, op. cit., p. 30.
\textsuperscript{1204} Harvey, op. cit., p. 39. See also p. 122, where Harvey suggests that instead of our life being defined by our relationships with people, it is defined by our relationships with technical organizations. Every time we ride in a car, enrol in a health maintenance organization, arrange for a mortgage to buy a house, or log onto the internet, we not only involve ourselves more and more in overlapping systems of expertise, but we also entrust them with determining the meaning of larger and larger chunks of our existence.
outside a formative cultural paradigm. This same mutuality exists in the relationship between the followship imperative and the Biblical texts. As the sacred texts are read, they are embodied in the lives of their readers and, as such, the followship community becomes a text itself. Reading the sacred texts of the Christian faith, then, is akin to reading the followship community – a community that “is both being written and read at one and the same time”. And just as it is with humanity’s relationship to cultural identity, in terms of textual identity, the place of story-telling is paramount.

With this in mind Rebecca Chopp refers to the ‘poetics of testimony’ that attempt to move beyond the rational discourse of existence and suggest an alternative ontology informed primarily by narrative:

“The poetics of testimony challenges how the real is both represented and created in culture by summoning us to question the role of modern theory as the court of the real”.

For Chopp, the poetics of testimony speak the unspeakable because its words are not essentially credible, not primarily formed by reason: “Compared to rhetoric, poetics seeks not so much to argue but to refigure, to reimagine and refashion the world”. This existential relocation from contextual reality to literary being creates a hyphenated existence that is best thought of in

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1205 Harvey, op. cit., p. 21. “Christianity entered history as a new social order, or rather a new social dimension. From the very beginning Christianity was not primarily a ‘doctrine’ but exactly a ‘community’.” (quoting Georges, F., "Empire and Desert: Anatomies of Christian History", The Greek Orthodox Theological Review: 3 (Winter).

1206 Pearson C., Hyphen, op. cit., p. 27 makes this suggestion in terms of the quest for individual bodily identity within a context of cultural diaspora.

1207 Pearson C., Hyphen, op. cit., p. 34, talks of the connection between diasporic faith and story-telling.


1209 Chopp in Brown (ed), op. cit., p. 61.
terms of a ‘textual diaspora’.\textsuperscript{1210} It is the Christian narrative itself that seeks to relocate us in terms of our ethical praxis, our hope for the future and our very sense of identity. To be a Christian is to be no longer Greek or Jew, slave or free, male or female.\textsuperscript{1211} It is quite obvious that these realities may still exist within the physicality of our existence (a person does not become androgynous in responding to the call to follow). But it is also true that the cultural and societal norms of our earthly existence are necessarily subverted by a narrative that insists upon participatory allegiance, regardless of ethnic origin, economic strata, or personal identity.

This idea of subversion, however, is not some sort of organised sedition, intent on political revolution and mayhem. It is best envisioned as a form of sanctified subversion:\textsuperscript{1212} the subversion of the lie that arises from the hegemony of greed and violence perpetuated by empire,\textsuperscript{1213} rather than the subversion of society itself.\textsuperscript{1214} In this way, the gospel of Jesus Christ stands in stark contrast to the basic hermeneutic principles of the politics of empire, with its insistence upon an ontology of violence as the fabric of ordered

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\item \textsuperscript{1210} Harvey, op. cit., p. 26, talks about the fact that the early Christians saw themselves as sojourners/aliens/pilgrims in a foreign land, regardless of their geographical location.
\item \textsuperscript{1211} Galatians 3:28.
\item \textsuperscript{1212} Clapp, op. cit., p. 200.
\item \textsuperscript{1213} My use of the term ‘empire’ refers to the geopolitical domination and hegemony perpetuated by the powerful over the weak. See also Hall, Professing, op. cit., pp. 117-119. And also Myers, BS op. cit., pp. 5-7.
\item \textsuperscript{1214} Harvey, op. cit., p. 152. Harvey suggests that participation in modern society is akin to living within a lie. "People need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfil the system, make the system, are the system” (p. 135). He also rightly criticizes the church by recognising that contrary to the subversive nature of its calling, the Christendom era witnessed the ecclesial institutions of the church not only playing by the rules of empire but also helping to draft and enforce them (p. 31).
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society; that it is only in competition and antagonism, conflict resulting in winning and losing, that social order can be maintained. 1215

Thus, in order to live as an active participant within the gospel narrative, is also not to live as a participant within the other formative narratives that occupy the ontological landscape of our existence. But the Christian story is not merely one more ideological paradigm striving for precedence within a war of myths. 1216 It is instead a parallel story that is told alongside, within, and alternatively to the stories of empire and selfhood that are interwoven within our mythic memory. In doing so, it challenges, confronts and infiltrates existing narratives, in order to subvert and transform them. It does not necessarily oppose other narratives, per se, but rather seeks to convert them. With this in mind, the church must tell its story in such a way that the dichotomies between sectarian withdrawal and secular servitude 1217 become subsumed as part of the narrative construct itself.

Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic of the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One, was his attempt to discover Christ at work in the world, for the Christian story pre-exists within the formative stories of this and any age, if only we would have eyes to see and ears to listen. 1218 Even as Hitler sought to elevate the National Socialist version of German culture as an all-pervasive ideological narrative, Bonhoeffer’s writings in Nachfolge and Life Together seek to

1215 Harvey, op. cit., p. 27.
1216 See Segundo, op. cit., pp. 97-182. Segundo insists upon the ideological nature of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus. For Segundo, a faith that refuses to choose sides (ideologies) is a faith that becomes subservient to the predominant ideology of the status quo. The eschatological promises of God, however, are always on the side of the poor. The danger here, however, is that the rule and reign of God becomes subservient to an ideology of revolution that merely revisits the exploitations of the status quo, albeit in a different guise.
1217 Harvey, op. cit., p. 138.
1218 Isaiah 43:8ff.
articulate how the followship imperative can be lived out in a world that seems so at odds with the gospel mandate of the Kingdom of God.

9.1.3 From Imagination to Followship

Our very identity as Christians is one that is called into question by the imaginings of both secular society in general, and the church as institution in particular.\(^{1219}\) In a post-Christendom era in the west, the institutional church still finds itself seduced by the “lying dreams”\(^{1220}\) of a bygone ecclesia gloria; it is bedevilled by a delusion of misplaced grandeur that sought allegiance with the very powers and principalities\(^{1221}\) that were the traditional polemic of the first century ecclesia. At the same time the Christian church also seeks to understand its identity in terms of an artificially imposed dichotomy of the sacred and the secular, as though there is some sort of pre-arranged space for matters of religious concern. Such an approach creates both a pedestal and a prison for the church: a pedestal in terms of its access to power and resources, and a prison in the relegation of religious discourse to so-called spiritual matters that do not concern the social, political, and economic realms of everyday life.


\(^{1220}\) Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Harvey quotes Yoder (1989, p. 82).

\(^{1221}\) Ephesians 6:12. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”. *(New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.)*
This separation of the sacred and the secular is one that at its very core threatens the existential identity of the Christian church. The original understanding of the word ‘secular’ (Latin: saeculum), did not, in fact, refer to “a space or realm separate from the religious or sacred, but to the temporal period between the fall and the eschaton, and thus to the here and now”\textsuperscript{1222}. In other words, the concept of a ‘secular realm’ is one that has “been fashioned rather than found”\textsuperscript{1223} for the prevenient grace of God is one that invades all aspects of life and existence. The Christian church, if it is to be a church that existentially connects with people of its age and context, must by definition be a secular church.\textsuperscript{1224} It is with this in mind that Bonhoeffer dreams of a ‘religionless Christianity’: a form of church that lives in the world, existing for others, becoming a community of followship.

Claiming an identity formed by participation within testimony and narrative, suggests that our understanding of who we are has an ontological relationship with the stories we tell; we cannot do apart from the stories that inform our existence. Whenever and wherever there is incongruence and inconsistency between a community’s narrative and action, between testimony and history, between the poetics of our imagining and the prose of our reality, there is also a terrible dislocation in terms of identity.\textsuperscript{1225} To speak of followship, then, is to firmly locate a sense of Christian being in synergy with the imperative of doing (following). It is not that one has precedence over the other, but rather a

\textsuperscript{1222} Harvey, op. cit., p. 103.
\textsuperscript{1223} Harvey, op. cit., p. 112.
\textsuperscript{1224} Bonhoeffer, LPP, op. cit., p. 280.
\textsuperscript{1225} Healy, N. M., Church World and Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology, University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 15. Healy talks about mispracticed discipleship – to confess one thing and act out another. See also Brueggemann, W., Finally Comes the Poet, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1989, pp. 1-11. (Referred to as Poet from here on.)
declaration that neither exists without the other. It is our being that insists upon our doing and our doing that locates our being.\textsuperscript{1226}

When Bonhoeffer talks about his realised hermeneutic of the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One, he is not only saying that the narratives of the New Testament must become the lens through which we see the world, or even that we should be like the characters of the gospels who encounter Jesus in their daily living, rather he is saying that we should become like Christ himself.\textsuperscript{1227} The disciple of Christ finds his/her life in the following of Christ, as the story of Christ becomes the story of the disciple: the story of incarnated love, embedded in community, in solidarity with the poor and the marginalised; the story of crucified justice, persecuted for the sake of righteousness, advocating for peace and forgiveness in the midst of violence and hardship; the story of resurrected hope, rising from the certainty of despair, overcoming oppression and liberating the oppressed.

Lindbeck advises that it is not,

\begin{quote}
that believers find their story in the Bible, but rather that they make the story of the Bible their story… It is the text which absorbs the world… rather than the world the text.\textsuperscript{1228}
\end{quote}

Bonhoeffer’s writing also reminds us that the story of followship is a costly one. In Nachfolge Bonhoeffer laments the church’s unwillingness to pay the price of costly grace, and identifies all too clearly the dangers of compromise and comfort and conformity to the hegemony of the prevailing powers.

\textsuperscript{1226} See also Bonhoeffer, \textit{AB, op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{1227} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics, op. cit.}, p. 124.
\textsuperscript{1228} Lindbeck, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 118.
Followship is always found incarnated among the poor and the marginalised, it is always found crucified among those who stand for justice against the powers who would oppress, it is always found resurrected from tombs of fear and despair.

Ched Myers, writing about the existential location of the church, reminds us that the church’s relationship with the poor has been mandated in Mark 14:7.

This text has notoriously been used by politicians and preachers alike to justify the existence of poverty, as if Jesus is stipulating its inevitability as a condition of nature or, worse, as a divine plan. In fact, the text is emphatic: ‘For the poor will always be with you, and whenever you will you can do the right thing by them’. 1229

By way of illustrating his point, Myers remembers the story of St Lawrence the Deacon.

He and nine companions of the early church were convicted of treason by the Roman authorities, but because Lawrence was the treasurer of the Church of Rome, he was spared immediate execution. It seems that the authorities believed that the Church was fabulously wealthy (they were a few centuries too early!). So they commanded Lawrence to go away and bring back the treasures of the Church. "Give me two or three days," he replied, "and I will bring them here for you." Three days later Lawrence returned. "Where is the treasure?" the Romans demanded. Lawrence led them to the entrance of the hall and threw open the great doors leading to the courtyard. Outside was assembled a great crowd of poor, blind, and crippled humanity. "Behold, the treasure of the church," said Lawrence. He was taken away to be tortured, then roasted alive on a gridiron. 1230

1230 Myers, Treasure op. cit.
9.2 Eschatological Relocation: The Movement From Memory to Hope

If Christianity be not altogether thoroughgoing eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ.\textsuperscript{1231}

We consider story our living relative, and so it seems to us completely sensible that as one friend invites another friend to join in the conversation, so, too, a certain story calls forth a specific second story, which in turn evokes a third story, and frequently a fourth and fifth, and occasionally several more, until the answer to a single question has become several stories long.\textsuperscript{1232}

Just as words have no sense outside of narrative, so too, stories only exist in relation to other stories. The world we inhabit as human beings is a world full of stories which “like Matriochka dolls, fit one inside the other”.\textsuperscript{1233} For those who have forsaken all to become followers of the Christ, a whole new world of stories is awakened. The stories of the Christian faith, however, are not merely stories from the past. They are also stories that pre-empt a promised future, the eschaton, an end to all that we know and a beginning to all that we may dare to imagine. And, although it may be true that essentially every story has an ending,\textsuperscript{1234} it is also a truism to suggest there is no end as to how a story may be told. In coming to an understanding of the hope and promise contained within the Christian doctrine of the eschaton, a hermeneutic of followship opens the door to the possibility that the One who calls us to follow has already told our story and awaits us to join in.

\textsuperscript{1231}Barth, K., \textit{The Epistle to the Romans}, Oxford University Press, London, 1933, p. 314. (Referred to as \textit{Romans} from here on.)
\textsuperscript{1233}Estés, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{1234}Hauerwas, \textit{HR}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 128.
9.2.1 How We Begin to Speak of the End

Eschatology literally means ‘end words’, and, within the framework of Christian theology’s traditional systematic agenda, it has usually been relegated toward the end of a particular treatise. The terminology of the word ‘end’ in itself can, of course, be interpreted in a variety of different ways. An end can mean the last, but also the first; it can refer to a goal or purpose and yet also futility and the absence of purpose; it can designate a conclusion reached and also an instrument used to arrive at the zenith desired. Consequently, the doctrine of the ‘last things’ is no longer seen as the extent (or the end) of what eschatology has to offer. Instead, eschatological language permeates the landscape of contemporary theological research and investigation. What has emerged in recent times is the recognition of the primacy of eschatology. Furthermore, amongst

1235 Barth, Romans op. cit., p. 500. In dealing with the magnitude and finality of the Christian understanding of the eschaton, Barth ironically asks: “Who, when this spectacle is quite rightly delayed, shall be able to lull us comfortably to sleep by adding at the conclusion of Christian Dogmatics a short and perfectly harmless chapter entitled – Eschatology?”

1236 Eg. Bookends. See also Braaten, op. cit., p. 35, (quoting the philosophy of Ernst Bloch) “In a very real sense the real genesis is not at the beginning, but at the end.”

1237 Within the context of a gridiron game (American Football) the term end can be used to describe the conclusion of the time allowed for a passage of play, a particular section of the sporting field, and also a player’s role or function within the game itself.

1238 Braaten, op. cit., p. 96, Eschatology is about what lasts; it is also about what comes last, and the history that leads from the one to the other.

1239 Hall, D. J., Confessing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998, p. 457. (Referred to as Confessing from here on.) “(E)schatology is not ‘a doctrine’ among doctrines, but a dimension of every other doctrinal area”. See also pp. 469-470, where Hall explores the juxtaposition of what he refers to as the two traditional understandings of the word end within theological discourse: one meaning the conclusion of a thing (the doctrine of the last things) the other meaning the purpose of a thing (teleology).

1240 Migliore, op. cit., p. 231. “A doctrine of revelation would be flawed if it did not acknowledge that we now see through a glass darkly and not yet face to face; a doctrine of God would be deficient if it did not recognise the inexhaustible mystery of the triune God whose love is extended to the world in creation, redemption and consummation; a doctrine of creation would be incomplete if it failed to emphasize that the creation still groans for its liberation and completion; a Christology would be misleading if it did not stress that the Lord is not simply a memory or a present experience but also the One who is coming; our doctrines of the church and its sacraments would be pathetically inadequate if they
contemporary Biblical scholars, the Jesus of the New Testament is almost universally acknowledged as the proclaimer of an eschatological vision.\textsuperscript{1241} As such, the Christian faith is realised as an eschatological faith: it is a faith primarily based upon the movement from memory to hope,\textsuperscript{1242} rather than esoteric, philosophical, or legalistic preponderance.

The temporal intersection of memory and hope is developed further by Ernst Bloch. Bloch suggests that ideas may be a reflection upon perceived reality, or, when motivated by hope, may transcend existing reality via an anticipating consciousness.\textsuperscript{1243} As such, hope transgresses the existential boundaries of the present, by anticipating the future, and the future becomes a mode of being in itself. For Bloch there is an ontological priority of the future that necessarily determines our understanding of the present; our hope for the future interprets the now. In terms of Christian theology, Bloch’s philosophical analysis of hope understands the revelatory disclosure of God in the present as tied to God’s promises of the future.

\textsuperscript{1241} Schweitzer, op. cit., was arguably the first to insist that eschatology was central and not peripheral to the proclamation of the Good News by Jesus Christ. The eschatological Rule and Reign of God (referred to in scripture as the Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew) appears in the Bible 122 times, 99 times in the synoptic gospels, 90 times attributed as the very words of Jesus. For a more contemporary analysis and comparison of the juxtaposition between an eschatological Jesus on the one hand, and an apocalyptic Jesus on the other, read Patterson, S. J., “The End of Apocalypse: Rethinking the Eschatological Jesus”, in \textit{Theology Today}, April 1995, Vol 52, No 1, (pp. 29-48).


9.2.2 Transcending History Within the Biblical Narrative

This approach to history and revelation is of course also very much a product of the Hebraic understanding of God. For the Hebrew people, YHWH was a god of history, a history that was unfolding before them as part of YHWH’s covenant with Israel. The divine identifier of Exodus 3:14, (אִמֶּלֶךְ אֶלֶּה יְהֹוָה וְאָדָם) ‘I AM Who I AM’, can also be translated, ‘I Will Be Who I Will Be’. Thus, the God of Israel transcends tense – the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, is also the God of future promise embodied now in covenant.

For the early Christian church, the moment of Christ’s divine identity with respect to history, occurs in the epiphany of Revelations 4:8. The Christ is proclaimed as the ‘One who was and is and is to come’ (ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὄν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος). These creedal statements concretise the relationship between God and history, and in particular the notion of future and hope. The God of the great prophets from the past, has given promise to the future, which interprets the present.

In terms of Christian theology this temporal transcendence is no more evident than in the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and promised Parousia of Jesus Christ. Here God enters history, to become a part of history and then defies history in order to transcend history. Jesus enters history, born into poverty and oppression, and lives out history with the marginalised and the broken of humanity. Jesus is crucified for his part in history, for siding with the

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1244 See in particular Ruether, R. R., in Thistlethwaite S. B., and Engel M. P., (ed), Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside, Harper, San Francisco, 1990, pp. 116-118, for a feminist perspective. Ruether briefly outlines the changing understanding of eschatological ideas from this-worldly and finite, to other-worldly and eternal, throughout the history and development of Hebraic theology.
1245 Gen. 26:4. “I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring.”
forgotten and speaking out against injustice. The resurrection of Christ is a defiance of history in that it does not accept the historical norms that govern life, that death itself is the end. And Christ transcends history through the wonderment of his resurrection that refuses to be captive to the particularities of socio-historic context. The resurrection is for all time and every place.

This idea of transcendence, however, is not to be understood as a way of bypassing history, but rather overcoming it. Christ’s transcendence of history declares that it is history that will serve the resurrected Christ and not the other way around. It does so by way of witness to the continuing incarnating presence of the Holy Spirit in the embodiment of the historical church and the suffering of the least.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are our future because they are our perilous and hopeful present. This hope which overcomes death must be rooted in the heart of historical praxis; if this hope does not take shape in the present to lead it forward, it will only be an evasion, a futuristic illusion.¹²⁴⁶

This relationship between Christ and history should not be seen as somehow deterministic, for it is one borne of variance and incongruence – the eternal conflict between a fallen humanity trapped in time, and its longing for eternity. It is in the midst of this conflict that Christian hope becomes the wellspring of life, and the soothing balm for the wounds of the here and now:

The Christian hope is not a one-way street on which one leaves the present behind in order to flee into the future. It has two-way

¹²⁴⁶ Gutiérrez, G., A Theology of Liberation, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1988, p. 124. (Referred to as Liberation from here on.)
traffic, as it were. For it draws the future into the suffering of the present.\textsuperscript{1247}

In contrast to this more fluid understanding of Christian hope, a purely empirical-historical analysis of eschatological theory is intrinsically problematic. In essence, as beings trapped in time, we are limited in our ability to truly envisage the end of time. Furthermore, two twentieth century world wars have made Protestant-Liberalism’s assertions of historical progressivism untenable,\textsuperscript{1248} while more recent fundamentalist interpretations of an impending apocalypse seem fanciful and disjointed from reality.\textsuperscript{1249} Instead, history is best understood as the comprehensive horizon for Christian theology, the canvas upon which the creativity of God meets with humanity, rather than an eschatological instrument in itself. It is in the liminal space between the collection of quantitative data and the deliberation of qualitative analysis, that historical enquiry must recover the power of narrative and engage with history, rather than attempting to objectively scrutinize it.

The Greek understanding of time is useful here. In the Greek language, time is differentiated between two very distinct concepts, \textit{chronos} time and \textit{kairos} time. \textit{Chronos} time is quantifiable time; time measured by a watch. \textit{Kairos} time is instead qualitative time; time measured by meaning. A futuristic eschatology that is only interested in discerning the when (\textit{chronos}) of the eschaton, fails to recognise the realised (\textit{kairos}) eschatology evident in the

\textsuperscript{1247} Moltmann, J., \textit{Religion, Revolution and the Future}, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1969, p. 53. (Referred to as \textit{RRF} from here on.)

\textsuperscript{1248} I am indebted to Rev Dr Clive Pearson for reminding me that the failed liberal humanism of the nineteenth century also provided the seedbed from which the latter eschatological treatise of theologians such as Moltmann and Pannenberg grew. In effect, it became the theological cul-de-sac that gave impetus for the recovery of eschatological thinking.

\textsuperscript{1249} See in particular, Migliore, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 335 who refers to the writings of Lindsay, H., \textit{Late Great Planet Earth}, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1970, and others as apocalyptic Terrorism.
Thus, the relationship between history and the eschaton should not be understood chronologically, but rather ontologically. History has meaning not because of what occurs within it, but because of the eschaton, which draws it forward. In this sense, Wolfhart Pannenberg speaks of the eschaton as the “fully realised revelation of God,” because it is the ultimate that defines the penultimate as a means of transition; “a clock’s tock suggests that first there was a tick.”

It is neither that history swallows up eschatology (Albert Schweitzer) nor does eschatology swallow up history (Rudolph Bultmann). The *logos* of the eschaton is the promise of that which is not yet, and for that reason it ‘makes history’. The promise which announces the eschaton, and in which the eschaton announces itself, is the motivating power, the mainspring, the driving force, and the torture of history.

A dynamic and potent example of this intersection between eternity and time is found in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Not only is this meal a remembrance of a past event, but also the anticipation of a future one. In this intersection, the Eucharist becomes an embodiment whereby the “future fulfilment of the past governs the present”. As such, the Eucharistic community lives on borrowed time, an interval between the eschatological realities of the first and second comings of Christ. The Eucharistic meal, then,

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1250 See also Hall, *Confessing op. cit.*, p. 479.
1254 Cavanaugh, *IA, op. cit.*, p. 228.
is an eschatological meal. It is a meal that is shared amongst sisters and brothers from the past, present and future, who are all one in Christ, and are experienced in the eternal now.

9.2.3 Surveying a Landscape of Duality

The Eucharist, as previously discussed, embodies a ‘surplus of meaning’ in relation to its temporality and transcendence, its symbolism and narrative memory. This surplus of meaning, however, is often in danger of ‘interpretative reductionism’ as a means of containing or controlling symbolic perception and engagement. Daniel Migliore warns against this kind of dangerous hermeneutic, and in particular, the process whereby the symbols and metaphors of Christian hope are interpreted a dualistic fashion. By contrasting and indeed formulating eschatological methodologies and approaches in opposition to one another, an either/or mentality is perpetuated that reduces the capacity for theology to fully converse with the engaging questions of faith and hope in the world. When eschatology is reduced to polemic discourse, its potentiality for creative imaginings of new beginnings is greatly diminished.

1255 See also Hall, Confessing op. cit., pp. 477-478.
1256 Cor. 5:17. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”
1258 Migliore, op. cit., p. 237. Migliore identifies four different oppositional categories within mainstream Christian eschatology: (i) futurist (Albert Schweitzer) or realised (C. H. Dodd); (ii) existential or personal (Bultmann) or corporate (Moltmann and the liberation theologians); (iii) historical (Modern Western theology) or cosmic (Eastern and process theology); (iv) God’s activity (neo-orthodoxy) or human activity (social gospel, praxis theologies). Rather than explore the many limitations and possibilities emerging from this range of inquiry, I will instead curtail my investigation to the eschatological implications pertaining to the ethical praxis of the Christian faith.
The Christian faith, however, is one that seeks to eradicate the social, economic and power disparities that divide community. Galatians 3:28-29, one of the most primitive New Testament texts within the Biblical canon, testifies to the ideal of Christian unity in terms of identity and eschatological promise: it is indeed a covenant that sees the concept of being in Christ Jesus as ontologically definitive, regardless of ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status. The hope of the Christian faith is that all divisions, indeed all opposition, would find reconciliation in Christ.

In essence, this process of reconciliation entails a kind of death to self – a denial of the individual. It also requires the submission of corporate desire and identity, that all parochial and partisan agendas may be subsumed by the will of the Divine. For when Paul declares in Galatians 2:20 that, “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me”, he does so in order to identify a transformed “I”, an eschatological “I”.

Ultimately this notion of being and identity in Christ is corporately remembered in the Eucharist: it is a foretaste of the end of all things. For as the broken body and spilt blood of Jesus is remembered to those who are gathered, they engage with the sacrament of communion (koinonia), whereby participants are bound to God and to each other. In the celebration of the Eucharist the eschatological promises of God are re-membered in the lives of believers; the members of the gathered community become the embodiment of the promise.

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1259 “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise”. (NIV)
1260 Matthew 16:24-25.
1261 NIV.
In the end, any division between a corporate and an individual understanding of eschatology is essentially an artificial one, originating from the fears and prejudices of a fallen community.

When communities experience material disparity concerning wealth, power, and access to resources (a divide that often correlates with gender difference), this also tends to correspond to an eschatological divide in terms of the necessary immediacy and defining qualities of perceived hope. James Cone suggests that those who oppress do not know or fear death because they do not know themselves, their finiteness and their mortal frailty. They instead believe that their dominance over others is tantamount to their victory over death and uncertainty. For the oppressed, however, death is a part of their everyday life.

This tendency towards material dualism and the denial of death by traditional orthodox theology has also led to a paralysis of eschatological notions of social justice. It is in this regard that Marx’s popularised criticism of organised religion is most potent. His reference to religion as the ‘opiate of the masses’ is an insightful critique of a futurised eschatology that seeks to silence the discontent of the now: future tenses can disguise present anguish.

1265 Thistlethwaite *op. cit.*, p. 110.
purpose in life, there is a hope of a future fulfilment yet to come; for those who have nothing and long for bread on their table, there is a hope that today (or perhaps even tomorrow) the promises of a just God will be realised.

In our contemporary context, this eschatological demand for justice has global consequences, because the future orientation of the western world as one of hope comes at the expense of the future of the two-thirds world. For the developing world to have future hope, however, the west must find its hope in sharing its wealth and prosperity rather than accumulating it. The promise of justice for the world means that those who have may need to give it away, in order that those who have not, may receive. Essentially the question of eschatology is one of theodicy: the existence of injustice in the world and our very response to it.

For the oppressed, a realised eschatology is the pregnant womb of social action:

(E)schatological perspective must be grounded in the historical present, thereby forcing the oppressed community to say no to unjust treatment, because its present humiliation is inconsistent with its promised future.

This notion of the promised future determining the present reality is one that values hope not as some sort of nebulous ideal of what may be, but as a transforming agent for what must be. Hope, even though it is oriented towards the future, transforms the present. Thus Christian eschatology,

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1266 Bauckham, R., in Ford, op. cit., p. 300.
1267 Cone, Black op. cit., p. 137.
1268 Gutiérrez, Liberation, op. cit., p. 123.
rightly understood, is not ahistorical, but rather is embedded in historical struggle. Ultimately one of the defining attributes of Christian theology is that it speaks of God historically and of history eschatologically.\textsuperscript{1269}

The followship imperative then, requires followers to live eschatologically, knowing that the eschaton is shaped by God’s dream of justice. It is not just ‘any’ future that followers live toward; it is God’s future. And God’s future demands solidarity with the poor and oppressed because this is the story of Jesus. A story ‘remembered’ into the future in order to give meaning to our present.

\textbf{9.2.4 Recovering a Proleptic Hermeneutic}

In the end eschatology is primarily about reconciliation\textsuperscript{1270} and being conjoined with the coming Christ. With this in mind I wish to explore the development of an eschatological hermeneutic whereby the emphasis rests not on the context of departure, but rather on the destination that awaits – a destination that is a person not a place, a lover not an ideology, a realised hope not a futuristic fantasy. The One who awaits is not some mystical being who avoids the concrete realities of our mundane existence, but the One who

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1269} Moltmann, J., “Hope and History”, in \textit{Theology Today}, Princeton Press, 25/0, 1968, (pp. 369-386), p 372. Compare also with Segundo, J. L., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 138-149, who talks of the danger of eschatologically differentiating between historical events on the one hand and the Kingdom of God on the other. Compare also with Gutiérrez, \textit{Liberation, op. cit.}, p. 140, who playfully suggests that “(t)o hope in Christ is at the same time to believe in the adventure of history.”

\textsuperscript{1270} See in particular Volf, M., “The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on a Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition”, in \textit{Modern Theology}, Blackwell Publishers, 16:1, January, 2000, p. 108. “The final reconciliation is the eschatological side of the vision of social transformation contained in the movement of the Triune God toward sinful humanity to take them up into the circle of divine communal love”.
\end{footnotesize}
calls us forward through the cries of injustice and suffering in a world that demands redemption. So, rather than emphasising eschatology as a study of the end, I wish instead to recover its promise of a new beginning. For the promise that ‘One will wipe every tear from their eyes and death will be no more’ is followed by the proclamation, ‘Behold I make all things new’.\textsuperscript{1271} Even as it demands faithfulness to the ancient narratives of the Christian faith, the followship imperative also understands that the Way of Jesus is the Way of resurrection and new life.

The eschatological kingdom is no mere fulfilment of the immanent possibilities of the present, but represents a radical new future… Authentic Christian hope is not that purely other-worldly expectation which is resigned to the unalterability of affairs in this world. Rather, because it is hope for the future of this world, its effect is to show present reality to be not yet what it can be and will be.\textsuperscript{1272} Eschatology then, is not merely about waiting for something to happen. Rather, it is the recognition that Jesus’ final words, “It is finished”,\textsuperscript{1273} have been existentially realised. In the midst of the dichotomy between paranoia and Parousia, proleptic eschatology begins with the radical promise of God’s future, and propels backwards to the present. Thus, a proleptic eschatological hermeneutic is one where the future is already known through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and demands to be realised in the eternal now. To look to the end that invades the now as some sort of utopian ideal,\textsuperscript{1274} however, is at the very least idolatrous;\textsuperscript{1275} and the seduction of other-worldly answers to the problematic realities of this world

\textsuperscript{1271} Revelations 21:4-5.  
\textsuperscript{1272} Bauckham, R., in Ford, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 299.  
\textsuperscript{1273} John 19:30.  
\textsuperscript{1274} Gutiérrez, \textit{Liberation}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 135, articulates utopia (rightly understood via Thomas Moore’s political satire) as not a return to a lost paradise but a futuristic hope of something to be achieved.  
\textsuperscript{1275} Griffiths, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 19.
are ultimately futile distractions in the praxis of faith. Christian eschatology is not so much interested in a when or a where, as it is in a who; hope primarily based upon someone not merely some-things.\textsuperscript{1276} In the Human One\textsuperscript{1277} we have the eschatological proleptic narrative for all of humankind, a preface that anticipates the frailty and brokenness of the human condition and pre-empts the eschatological cosmic healing of the created order.\textsuperscript{1278}

This prolepsis is, of course, a radical shift in how time and progress is usually understood. Since the Enlightenment, human movement and activity in the world has been understood in terms of evolution (steady development and progress towards a goal). Eschatology, however, is the opposite of evolution.\textsuperscript{1279} It is not about reaching the end of the evolutionary process, but “the new creation of all things which were, which are and which will be”.\textsuperscript{1280} Contrary to evolution, eschatology is not concerned about the past becoming the future, but rather insists upon the future invading the present. As such, eschatology demands that the evolutionary process of the survival of the fittest be redeemed, for it is with the weak and the poor, the outcast and the marginalised – evolution’s collateral damage – that the eschatological Christ is aligned.\textsuperscript{1281}

\textsuperscript{1276}See also Migliore, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 242.
\textsuperscript{1277}The author’s gender inclusive rendering of \textit{νικός τοῦ ἀνθρώπου}, normally translated as \textit{Son of Man}.
\textsuperscript{1278}Moltmann, \textit{Hope op. cit.}, p. 16. “From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionising and transforming the present”.
\textsuperscript{1279}Moltmann, J., \textit{Jesus Christ for Today’s World}, London, SCM Press, 1994, p. 104. (Referred to as \textit{JCTW} from here on).
\textsuperscript{1280}Moltmann, \textit{JCTW op. cit.}, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{1281}Moltmann, \textit{JCTW op. cit.}, pp. 99-106. In his later writings, Moltmann maintains the need for a theology of revolution as a polemic against the evolutionary hermeneutic proposed by Teilhard de Chardin, who goes so far as to welcome the development of nuclear weapons as a momentous achievement in the evolution of humankind. Moltmann insists upon a redeemer Christ, as opposed to the evolving Christ of Teilhard. This is an eschatological assertion that
Eschatology is also a contradiction of the notion of revolution (the restoration of pre-existing goals). The etymology of revolution (*Latin: revolvere*) suggests a ‘rolling back/again’ and finds its origins in astronomy where it is used with reference to the continual cyclical orbit of a celestial body. It later found usage in socio-political discourse and came to mean the overthrow of one system of governance and the substitution of another. The word, however, intrinsically suggests a return to the original, a perpetual cycle by which the past is revisited, albeit in another form.\textsuperscript{1282} Essentially revolution is actually a regressive development that merely returns humankind to the mistakes of the past, a process of becoming what we despise. Even in the infancy of YHWH’s covenant with Israel, we recognise that the oppressors have become the oppressed, when in the declaration of the Decalogue, those who had barely shaken off the shackles of their own enslavement were making provisions for the treatment of their own slaves.\textsuperscript{1283}

This notion of revolution also needs to be contrasted with the etymology of a word often (mistakenly) used in conjunction with it: rebellion. Rebellion, (*Latin: rebellare*) to ‘make war again’, does not, in and of itself, seek to replace the old system, but rather simply wages war against it.\textsuperscript{1284} The process of rebellion is one of continual conflict, whereby the innocents are consumed by the passion of the zealots. Good intentions and a fervent

differentiates between a Christ in his **becoming** (Teilhard) and a Christ in his **coming** (Moltmann).
\textsuperscript{1282} Moltmann, *Hope op. cit.*, p. 232. Particularly since the enlightenment, history has been experienced as a permanent state of crisis, or as a permanent, irresistibile and unrestrainable revolution. See also Migliore, *op. cit.*, p. 241, who talks about Karl Bath’s assertion of the Christian hope being a permanent revolution.
\textsuperscript{1283} Exodus 20:10. “But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female **slave**, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.”
\textsuperscript{1284} For further reading on this topic see in particular Smith, R. F., “A Theology of Rebellion”, *Theology Today*, Vol 25, No 1, April 1968, (pp. 10-22).
commitment to combat the injustices of the present do not intrinsically produce a just outcome. To make war, even against injustice, is to partake in violence; and violence is never just.

In the end, revolutions ultimately seek to justify their own validity by revisiting previous modes of existence, and rebellion against rebellion is still rebellion. Drawing upon the early writings of Jürgen Moltmann, I wish instead to recover and develop the notion of ‘provolution’ as a way forward. In provolution, the reactionary re is replaced by the future oriented pro as a means of learning from the past, interpreting the present and becoming the future:

In provolution, the human dream turned forward is combined with the new possibility of the future and begins consciously to direct the course of human history as well as the evolution of nature.\textsuperscript{1285}

Moltmann’s provolutionary ideal challenges existing frameworks of change and process, by insisting that the momentum and instigating substance of change is external to the medium being changed. In other words, we cannot change ourselves. Instead, the notion of provolution invites a creative imagining of the future whereby the present is transformed and re-created (procreated?) anew. Provolution provides a way forward that does not rely on contingencies of our own making, but rather the continual pro-creativity of God.

The revolutionary terrorism of the old order always turns into the absolutism of the new order, which is revengefully directed against its critics and thus against its future… (For) the anticipations and analogies of the future become manifest in present reality through the historical dialectic of the negation of the negative. The dialectic

\textsuperscript{1285} Moltmann, RRF op. cit., p. 32.
of thesis and antithesis is the presupposition by which one can recognise in the thesis the prefiguration of the future synthesis.\textsuperscript{1286}

It is with this in mind that the resurrection of the crucified Christ becomes of paramount importance in terms of its eschatological novelty in history. The resurrection of Jesus is much more than the mere resuscitation of a deceased person. In today’s world of medical advancements, people are often brought back to life, seemingly escaping the clutches of death. Such a thing is in reality only a temporary avoidance, not really an escape at all. Everyone who is resuscitated will still eventually die. In the resurrection, however, we do not have a previous life revisited, but something entirely new. The resurrection is not a celebration of life after death, but new life overcoming death.

Wittgenstein’s previously discussed assessment of ‘knowing how to go on’ has much to offer at this point. Observation, for Wittgenstein, is very different to understanding, and we often confuse the two. The limitations of our own experience and knowledge (and language) will predetermine the extent to which we are able to ‘imagine’ a future beyond our own reckoning. Just as numbered sequences only make sense to us if they ‘go on’ as they always have within the scope of our own observations, so too our understanding of the future is limited to the finite resources at our disposal. Wittgenstein’s analysis poses the question for us, “what if that which lies ahead has not already gone before?” Just as the gospel witness tells us that the resurrected Christ was not recognised by his closest companions,\textsuperscript{1287} why are we to assume that we would recognise the resurrected Christ in our midst? The

\textsuperscript{1286} Moltmann, \textit{RRF op. cit.}, p. 32.
grammar of our theology dictates that a new vocabulary may be required to speak of the possibilities of hope and love, peace and justice that the resurrection promises. The same grammatical rules still apply, the Christo-centricity of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection – but a new word is needed to give shape to future not yet imagined into being.

Strictly speaking, in order to maintain linguistic consistency and integrity with our previous discussion, the Crucified One is not resurrected at all, but rather ‘prosurrected’. To speak of life breaking free from the shackles of injustice is insurrection; to speak of that which has died coming back to life once more is resurrection; and to speak of new life, where once there was old, is to speak of prosurrection. In the raising of Jesus from the grave, eternity steps into time, the eschaton steps into history and nothing will ever be the same. Eschatologically speaking, in the prosurrection of Jesus Christ, death is no more.

The all-embracing vision of God and of the new creation is for Christian hope anchored in the (pro)surrection of the crucified Christ. In the (pro)surrected Christ we can know a new freedom in history which is not only a liberation from the tyrannies within history, but also a liberation of the tyranny and agony of history itself. The power of the past, which drags everything that exists into its wasteland where things cease to exist, is broken by hope which draws the new future into the sufferings of the present. Thus, the evening and its farewells is a poor symbol for historical life, which is more like the morning with its greeting of a new day.  

1288 Moltmann, RRF op. cit., p. 37. Moltmann’s original article uses the term resurrected rather than the insertion of my own term ‘prosurrected’.
9.2.5 From Narrative Participation to Eschatopraxis

Prosurrection must be more than a theological novelty, if not in name, most definitely in praxis. It must instead become the eschatological optic through which the world is both viewed and experienced. Through this optic, the way we view the world must also inform the way we act in the world, for eschatology and ethics are conversation partners that will not keep quiet; each informs the other. Eschatology provides the ontological direction to which ethical praxis leads us, and ethics is the very air in our lungs as we cheer the arrival of the eschaton. In this sense, eschatology becomes a verb, a doing word. It is as we participate within the eschaton, that we become eschatological people, people of the cross and the prosurrection. As such, the eschaton becomes the orientation of our followship.

Eschatological optics, in essence, is quite simple. We all look at the world differently. Culture, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status and sexual orientation all play a role in helping us see the world. How we see the world, provides a lens through which we interpret the world.\textsuperscript{1289} The differences evident in the way we see/think/know in relation to the world around us, also affect the way we see/think/know in regard to aspects of Christian doctrine such as eschatology. What we see and how we interpret, in the end, primarily validates our already held presumptions and necessarily draws upon our own life-experiences.

\textsuperscript{1289} McClendon, J. Jnr, \textit{Doctrine: Systematic Theology Volume 2}, Nashville, Abingdon, 1994, pp. 75-77. McClendon unpacks this in terms of Wittgenstein's picture thinking. He demonstrates how two different people can look at the same picture and see very different things, even in the case of a simple line drawing.
When we see something new, however, we view the world through an optical filter that tries to make sense of it. It is this process of making sense that becomes an optical hermeneutic with relation to the world at large. For a small child, where it seems that everything they see is new, this process is somewhat time-consuming, confusing, perhaps painful and most certainly educative.¹²⁹⁰ So too, eschatological hermeneutics begins with the assumption that everything is new;¹²⁹¹ the old has gone and the new has come.¹²⁹² As such, to look at the world with an eschatological optic is to view the world in such a way that it is opened up to new possibilities and creative opportunities for the rule and reign of God, the promise of the eschaton, to become a reality. But, as we have already learned with Wittgenstein’s duck/rabbit, this process is more about ‘seeing as’, then it is about interpretation; more about a predisposition toward the kingdom, then it is about some sort of reasoned choice. As Bonhoeffer reminds us, followers of Christ are not called to choose - only to obey.

A hermeneutic of followship does not only involve the way we view the world, but also the way we engage with it in praxis. At this point I wish to borrow a term introduced by Carl Braaten, ‘eschatopraxis’ – doing the future ahead of time.¹²⁹³ The eschatopraxis of the early church was one that identified strongly with the immanent rule and reign of God. Within the gospel narratives, this eschatological optic is incarnated in written form in such a way that the story of Jesus becomes an eschatological narrative. The eschatology

¹²⁹⁰ Mark 10:15. “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”
¹²⁹¹ Revelations 21:5b. “See, I am making all things new.”
¹²⁹² 2 Corinthians 5:17.
¹²⁹³ Braaten, op. cit., p. 121.
of Jesus was also a political eschatology, for the eschatological optic through which first century Palestinians viewed the world was one that was subsumed by the all-encompassing hegemony of the Pax Romana.1294

In reaction to this, apocalyptic writing emerged that contrasted the ‘rule of Rome’ with the eschatological promises of the coming ‘Rule of God’. A war of myths1295 transpired whereby the prevailing hegemony of Rome was confronted by the subversive imaginings of the early ecclesia. In response, the radical non-violence of Jesus’ eschatological narrative that proclaimed an ethic of love and forgiveness, rather than one of vengeance and political conquest, became a polemic against all other ethics. It was an ideology to subvert all others, indeed that subverted the notion of ideology itself. Borrowing the language of empire, the early church envisioned their world differently, and sought to invoke a polemical parallelism whereby they came to see their own socio-political landscape through different eyes.1296

In fact, much of the Christocentric language of today’s church began within the early faith communities as an eschatological polemic against the Pax Romana of their day. The beginning of Mark’s gospel proclaims (Αρχή τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ), ‘The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ the Son of God’,1297 as a politically subversive parody that sought to radically challenge the hegemony of Rome. Mark’s introduction determined an eschatological optic through which to view the unfolding

1294 Myers, BS, op. cit., p. 81. See also Richard, A. Horsley, Jesus and Empire: The kingdom of God and the New World Disorder, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2003, pp. 155-34.
1295 This phrase was originally coined by Wilder, op. cit., see in particular pp. 103-121. Wilder is critical of the technical definition that Rudolph Bultmann applied to myth and instead refers to the mythopoetic nature of the New Testament writing as having an implicit claim to provide valid representation of the world and dramatisation of existence (p. 105).
1296 Patterson, op. cit., pp. 29-48.
1297 Mark 1:1.
narrative: Caesar Augustus was also known as the Son of God, and political propaganda of the time would often refer to news about the Caesar as *(εὐαγγέλιον)* Good News. But this text also suggests, by borrowing from the Septuagint’s opening line *(αρχὴ - beginning/first)*, a new Genesis and a new way of seeing the world. This sense of a new beginning also provided an eschatological optic through which to conceive of a new ending. From within the eschatological horizon of its own existence, the early church was able to imagine a new way of seeing the world, and with it came an end to the way in which Rome dictated the world should be.

The gospel narratives explore this eschatological optic, especially in the parables that Jesus told. In Jesus’ parables, listeners are invited into another world, a world of metaphor and symbol where things are not as they seem, because parables exist in *kairos* time. In the midst of this creative imagining, time ceases to be and the narrative becomes the pulse by which existence is measured. Thus, the early Christian communities had a foreshortened sense of future time where the future was not seen as a distant proposition, but rather as the ‘not yet’ that invades the present.

Ironically, however, the origins of this eschatological optic, an anticipation of the ‘not yet’, are found in the distant past: the Hebraic socio-economic tradition of Jubilee.\(^{1298}\) For the Hebrew people, each new generation (every 50 years), would see restorative justice apply to the nation whereby land and resources would be redistributed equally amongst the people. Throughout Israel’s covenantal history, it was a continual reminder of *YHWH*’s radical

\(^{1298}\) Leviticus 25:8-17. See also Ruether, in Thistlethwaite, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
demands for community transformation in relation to the nation’s preconceived notions of material wealth and power. From a Christian perspective, the Jubilee tradition proleptically anticipates the coming Rule and Reign of God where everyone will have a ‘hundredfold houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children and fields, and along with these, persecutions, but in the age to come eternal life’.  

Eschatopraxis, then, is a call to action. But it is also a call recognising that resurrection hope is based upon the activity of the divine, not of humankind. It is in this sense that the proleptic nature of eschatopraxis needs to fully understood. To engage in the work of the coming kingdom is to actively anticipate the promises of God, not in terms of our own context or desire, but in terms of the end in Christ that draws ever nearer.

In (eschatopraxis) it may truly be said that the end justifies the means, because the end is proleptically present and operative beforehand, rehearsing the qualities of the eschatological kingdom – peace, love, joy, freedom, equality, unity – in the course of history's forward movement. 

The challenge of eschatopraxis, in the future becoming the present, is that the promises of God's rule and reign are incarnated in the proleptic action of Christ's followers. As such, disciples of Christ are in essence eschatological people, the embodiment of the eschaton. This embodiment is, of course, a dim reflection of what is yet to be. But just as a reflection is determined by its image, so too, the ethical praxis of Christ’s followers is determined by the proleptic rehearsal of the coming Christ.

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1299 Mark 10:30.
1300 Moltmann, Hope op. cit., p. 216.
1301 Braaten, op. cit., p. 121.
1302 Braaten, op. cit., p. 100.
1303 1 Corinthians 13:12.
Eschatopraxis is a conversation between eschatological ethics and active participation in the welcoming of God’s rule and reign. It is a concretising of human rights, ecological sustenance and social justice in the world. It is a creative reckoning that anticipates the coming eschaton of hope and promise amidst the darkness and despair of mundane existence. It is a subversive hope that dares to believe in that which only its eschatological optic can discern. And yet it also refuses to allow discernment to be an end in itself. If history itself is seen as the “horizon of God’s promise”,\textsuperscript{1304} then as agents of history, the church is an active participant in the making of history and the fulfilment of all that is to come. As Moltmann, in discourse with Marx’s popularised claim regarding socio-historical analysis, provocatively suggests:

(t)he theologian is not concerned merely to supply a different interpretation of the world, of history and of human nature, but to transform them in expectation of a divine transformation.\textsuperscript{1305}

At this point we return to Bonhoeffer’s writing in *Ethics* on the ultimate and penultimate as germane to our investigation.\textsuperscript{1306} For Bonhoeffer it is the ultimate that predestines the penultimate; the very nature of what lies ahead prepares the present for the future. The ultimate and the penultimate occur side by side, in partnership with each other, but it is always the ultimate that defines and fulfils the penultimate; it is always the penultimate that serves and adheres to the ultimate. Our path towards the ultimate is traversed through the penultimate, and our journey through the penultimate is one which the ultimate ushers in.

\textsuperscript{1304} Moltmann, *Hope*, op. cit., pp. 325-329.
\textsuperscript{1305} Moltmann, *Hope*, op. cit., p. 84.
This relationship between the penultimate and ultimate is one that is mediated by grace. The penultimate is God’s gift of preparation; the ultimate is God’s gift of fulfilment. The incarnation is a penultimate for the crucifixion; the crucifixion is a penultimate for the resurrection. So, according to Bonhoeffer’s thesis then, the eschaton is, in someway at least, fulfilled as the ultimate breaks into the daily lives of Christ’s followers; for Bonhoeffer insists that the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection are all around us, if only we would have eyes to see.

To live by the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the justification of a life before God.\textsuperscript{1307}

\section*{9.3 How Do We Go On?}

Christianity is not a universal story about all human existence (though it involves aspects of our existence with which we must all deal) but a story of a man who came to a designated people. It does not provide us for example with a philosophy of life but rather a story that is offered as one to be made our own.\textsuperscript{1308}

Theology must be at least biography…Biography at its best will be theology.\textsuperscript{1309}

The call of Christ is one that demands all.\textsuperscript{1310} It is not enough to make broad sweeping doctrinal statements, however, that challenge the very fabric of our existence, without also providing a way forward in terms of the praxis of faith.

\begin{flushright}
1307 Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, op. cit., p. 121.  \\
1308 Hauerwas, \textit{Existence}, op. cit., p. 29.  \\
1309 McClendon, \textit{BT}, op. cit., p. 22.  \\
1310 Matthew 19:27b: “Look we have left everything and followed you.”
\end{flushright}
In the end, doctrine is validated not through theory or debate, but by the evidence of lives lived. As such, the truth of Christ is only ever seen to be true in the lives of his followers; those who would dare to live a life of followship. But this truth is also mixed with lies, disobedience and regret, because all who follow inevitably fail. If this is the case, then what hope is there for any of us?

The followship project must find a way to endure what Walter Brueggemann laments as the loss of “poetry in a prose flattened world”. Brueggemann asserts that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a “subversive fiction” that seeks to defiantly re-create an “evangelical world: an existence shaped by the news of the gospel.”

It is in this world of poetry and good news that the adventure of followship is to be enacted. Despite the impossibility of the task before us, the grace of God, the greatest fiction of them all, is more than sufficient. In the re-telling of God’s story, new possibilities emerge.

For African-American slaves, dreaming of deliverance and freedom, God’s narrative was embodied in the singing of liberation songs.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Slaves working in the rail-gangs and cotton-fields, stretching across the North American continent, boldly identified themselves with the crucified Jesus. Not only were they ‘there’; they also saw themselves upon the cross with Jesus.

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1311 McClendon, BT, op. cit., p. 80.
1312 Mark 10:26b: Then who can be saved?
1313 Brueggemann, Poet, op. cit., p. 1.
1314 Brueggemann, Poet, op. cit., p. 3.
1315 Brueggemann, Poet, op. cit., p. 6. Brueggemann quotes Garret Green (paraphrasing on 1Cor 1:25). “(T)he fictions of God are truer than the facts of men”.

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He, too, was embodied in their suffering. Songs such as these transcend time and place and offer liberation greater than the words they employ.

Oh Mary don’t you weep don’t you cry,
Pharaoh’s army got drowned, oh Mary don’t you cry.

So, when these same slaves sing a song of comfort to a young oppressed Jewish girl living 2000 years ago on another continent, about an event that happened 1500 years before that in yet another part of the world, they dare to become part of a different story. In doing so, they are subsumed by an imagination greater than the one that informs their everyday struggle. To follow Jesus is to become part of this narrative. To take up the cross and follow, is to sing a song of liberation that demands to be sung.

The call of Christ is a call to followship. It is to embark on a journey where the starting point begins with the existential location of each believing community, and yet the ultimate destination is already known. It is a journey of transformation that takes us from self-centredness to other-centredness, and along the way teaches that life is finite, and there are boundaries and limitations to what we may achieve. Yet it is the boundaries that help us to appreciate the centre; the struggle that gives meaning to the journey; and the times of sorrow that enable us to enjoy the liberty of laughter all the more.

Rather than fall into despair, the frailty of our own existence is an occasion for wisdom and the opportunity to embrace our humanness as image bearers of the divine. By differentiating between our human existence and the final

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destiny that awaits, the promise of the eschaton challenges our notions of being in the world, and our relationships with each other and creation. Jesus Christ proleptically reveals a glimpse of what humanity can and must be – an existence defined by love, forgiveness and reconciliation; a purposeful preference for the poor and the outcast; and a human embodiment of God’s notion of jubilee. It is as the story of God becomes our story, as we walk in the steps of the One who calls us by name, that the dream of the Kingdom of God comes into being.

Our metaphors and stories entice us to find a way to bring into existence the reality that at once should be, but will not be, except as we act as if it is.\(^\text{1317}\)

Wittgenstein’s question of ‘how to go on’ is once more pertinent at this point, in terms of both praxis and location, as too is Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic of followship. Wittgenstein reminds us that, ‘as it has been, does not mean it will always be’, and the Christian hope is one that longs for better days ahead, because of what has gone before. The resurrection of Christ, as an eschatological event, calls forth a future that is yet to be finalised, even as it is realised in our daily living, for Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic of Christ in the world as the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One, is a proleptic of the church as the Body of Christ, just as the Resurrected Christ is a proleptic of the Kingdom of God.

\(^{1317}\) Hauerwas, \textit{HR, op. cit.}, p. 168.
Part Three

An Australian Context

The idea of a followship imperative was proposed in the opening chapter. It was set over and against Christendom’s pervasive and paradigmatic notion of discipleship. The underlying contention was that it was only on the Way with Christ that the Christian faith could be ever be truly understood. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was identified as the critical foil for this discussion.

The focus of Part One was on the development of Bonhoeffer’s theology. His hermeneutic of followship was established as a common theme. According to his theses in Sanctorum Communio and Act and Being, the church is the body of Christ taking up space in the world; revelation in Christ is our source of truth and meaning. In Creation and Fall and Christ the Centre, Bonhoeffer’s theological dialectic made use of a Christological hermeneutic in reading both Word and world. From the experiment at Finkenwalde followship was seen to be costly, confessional, and communal. That is the message of Nachfolge and Life Together. From Ethics, and Letters and Papers from Prison, the focus fell on Bonhoeffer’s realized eschatology, and his dreaming for the church’s engagement with a ‘world come of age’. Throughout all of his writings, a common hermeneutic emerges. Bonhoeffer sought to identify the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One already existing in the world and for the world. Reading Bonhoeffer in such a way required a second naïveté.
There is an aspirational intentionality about his religious language that the critical industry of Bonhoeffer studies can reduce.

Bonhoeffer was helpful in identifying a hermeneutic of followship, but it is the hermeneutic itself that is of primary concern. Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic rightly understood becomes a way for the Church, as the very presence of Christ in the world, to see the world. For Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic understands that the Church is only the Church when it is ‘for’ the world. And so the Incarnate One becomes a sign-post for the Church to identify with the poor and the lost, the Crucified One demands that the Church recognise Christ present with all those who are unjustly persecuted for the sake of righteousness, and the Resurrected One allows the Church to see hope arise from the midst of despair.

The pivotal discussion in Part Two turned on the provocative insights of Ludwig Wittgenstein with regards to language games and picture thinking. How do they contribute to our understanding of how we speak of God? Through a methodology of narrative participation it was discerned that the stories of the gospels were not for spectators but rather spect-actors – that is, for those who were willing to step into the story of Christ in order to follow. This particular insight led to the discovery of eschatopraxis where the future is done ahead of time; it amounts to living as though the Kingdom of God has already arrived.

Now the hermeneutics of followship must engage an Australian context. For following, stories, and participation do not happen in a vacuum. They occur in specific times and places. Where is Christ to be found? What does is mean to
follow in this setting? How is the follower to participate in the narrative of the gospels within the stories that shape life in this land?

By way of introduction, Laurence Thornton’s novel *Imagining Argentina* can provide a bridge. The context of Thornton’s novel is of course very different to that of contemporary Australia, and yet this contrast actually highlights the importance of the hermeneutic at work. For the context of contemporary Australia is also very different to that of first century Palestine. If we are to utilize a universal hermeneutic of followship that we see evidenced in the gospel narratives, it must also be able to be readily applied in any context, in every time and place. It is the consistency of the hermeneutic that is important here. Thornton’s hermeneutic, then, is one that invites hope-filled imagination as a mediator for ethical praxis. Thornton’s fiction weaves different imaginings of the world together, creating a new reality for his characters to inhabit, one that seeks to redeem the fear and conflict around them. From his writing we learn that the way we imagine Christ already present in the world, is indicative of the way we engage the world.

The central character in Thornton’s narrative is Carlos Rueda, a children’s playwright and theatre director who lives under the brutal dictatorship of General Guzmán and his cohorts during the military regime in Argentina of the late 1970’s. Carlos’ wife and daughter are counted among the disappeared. They have vanished without trace as a consequence of their refusal to conform to the hegemony of the oppressive junta rule.

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1318 Thornton, *op. cit.*, Much thanks here is also due Cavanaugh, *IA, op. cit.*, whose reference to Imagining Argentina inspired me to read the book.
In the midst of his fear and anguish and the fruitless search for his loved ones, Carlos is visited with an amazing gift. One day as he attempts to comfort a young boy whose father, a university professor, has been abducted for corrupting the minds of his students, Carlos realizes that his imagination is not his own. He tells the boy that tonight his father will hear footsteps in the corridor outside his cell. A man will enter wearing a colonel’s uniform and bearing a tray of food and a carafe of wine. The colonel will tell his father to be more careful about what he says to his students, allow him to shave and then release him from prison. Even as he sees the glimmer of hope reflected in the young boy’s eyes, Carlos winces at the cruelty of the fiction he has perpetrated. But, as is often the case in stories, the miraculous happens. Everything occurs as Carlos said it would. And soon, as word spreads of the wondrous story-teller, the man whose imagination becomes reality, his garden begins to fill with the desperate and the hopeful who long to hear news of their loved ones.

Carlos’ friends of course are not so easily convinced. They only know Carlos as the children’s theatre director, not as prophet and seer. As Carlos shares his gift, some are mistakenly held captive to a perceived dichotomy of fantasy verses reality, of hopeful dreaming verses the harsh light of day. They can only envision the pathetic contrast between words and bullets, between story and verity, as though somehow the two were incongruous or inverse. Carlos, however, rightly understands that the world in which he lives and dreams is not a battleground between imagination and reality but between two different imaginations. There are those like General Guzmán who imagine Argentina as simply a means to an end of their own making, and then there is the
imagination of those who dare to dream otherwise. For Carlos the choice is to decide which imagination to live inside.

In Part Three of our study, we shall dare to dream what it is like to live inside the imagination of God. Such an imagination, Tony Kelly reminds us, is at once ethical and poetic.  

Political ‘realities’ are always products of imagination. The borders of the nation-states we inhabit, the myth of freedom perpetuated by liberal democracy, economic constructions such as credit and debt, are all products of imagination. We all live inside imaginary worlds. We simply convince ourselves that they are real.

Richard Grigg explores the role imagination plays in Christology by identifying what he calls the ‘Christological Circle’. Building on the work of Heidegger, Grigg claims it is our imagination, based on accumulated knowledge, that first provides the foundations for our Christology. This process then repeats itself as new imaginings emerge.

I must approach an interpretation with a pre-understanding of what is to be grasped if I am to be able even to initiate the task. But, as understanding proceeds, my pre-understanding will be corrected or modified.

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1320 Also see Cavanaugh, W. T., *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumption*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 2002. (referred to as *TI* from here on). p. 1. “Politics is a practice of the imagination.”
Grigg stipulates that Christology is always the study of ‘imaginary Christ’s’. For Grigg, the use of the qualifying term, ‘imaginary’, far from being dismissive, implies the existence of a ‘real’ Christ that is reconstructed via the imaginative process.\textsuperscript{1324} It is the very process of ‘imaginative reconstruction’ that we shall now undertake in a contemporary Australian context.

My investigation into the Australian imagination shall begin with the notion of the Incarnated One articulated through narratives of mythology and fiction. Just as the prologue in John’s gospel talks of the Word that has come to live among us, so too, in different examples from Australian fiction and Aboriginal Dreaming we shall see Christ already present in the world of stories in which we reside. The Crucified One is identified in the way the Australian media has vilified the ‘other’ who lives among us; in particular we will look at the hostile treatment of asylum seekers and the rise of Islamaphobia. Rene Girard’s theories pertaining to ‘scapegoating’ and mimetic violence will also be of use as we compare the humiliation of Christ at the hands of Herod and Pilate with Australia’s recent maltreatment of refugees from the Middle East. The third part of my application will discover the Resurrected One in the personal testimonies of flood survivors from my home state of Queensland. I will compare those who lost so much during the 2011 floods with the first disciples who grieved the death of their Messiah. Despair is the fertile soil needed for hope to arise. But for the (pro)surrection to be evident in our everyday lives it must be more than theological hyperbolae. It must reside in the personal witness of those who have left behind the misplaced idealism of modernity’s

\textsuperscript{1324} Grigg, R., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 18. The term ‘imaginary unicorn’ does not make sense because it is either redundant, or implies the existence of a ‘real’ unicorn.
empty promises of certitude and security, and instead entertain the possibility of an empty tomb as a way of embracing the Way of hope that lies ahead.

For each application of Bonhoeffer’s hermeneutic of followship, we will examine different narrative genres. The Incarnated One is illuminated through well-crafted stories that have been carefully shaped with creative intentionality and purpose. The Crucified One is seen via ethnic vilification built upon fear, loathing and scapegoating. The Resurrected One is discovered in hope-filled tales of personal testimony. These are different mediums of story-telling being used; different language games at play. And yet for each example, the hermeneutic of followship becomes our lens. We encounter each story as followers of Christ: spect-actors within God’s grand narrative of love and reconciliation. And we are called to respond to each story as followers of Christ: those whose eschatopraxis welcomes the coming Kingdom of God.
Chapter Ten:

An Australien Story

The moment a society wishes to give an official story of itself, it becomes a lie. Which is exactly what has happened in the year of the Bicentenary – which is also the year of the great Australian lie… Perhaps it is normal in a jungle where the human beast is the most savage of all – where for all our rationalising and material progress, we more or less take it for granted that our behaviour shall be sustained by lies.

To the question “Who do you say that I am?” we cannot give a merely theoretical answer. What answers it, in the final analysis, is our life, our insertion in history, our manner of living the gospel. Peter’s affirmation “You are the Christ,” is fundamental. But what is demanded is that we make that affirmation the meaning of our life – accepting all the consequences however hard they may be.

The search for some sort of all-encompassing Australian theology has been one that has preoccupied scholars from Down-Under since the 1960’s. In recent years, however, there has been a realization that such a quest is both

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1325 The title of this chapter is inspired by a portrait by Australian artist Susan White titled, ‘The First Supper’ which was painted in 1988 at the time of the Australian Bicentenary. The painting is a contemporized version of Leonardo Da Vinci’s, ‘The Last Supper’, showing 12 women of different nationalities in place of the 12 disciples, and an aboriginal woman wearing a t-shirt with an aboriginal flag as the Christ figure. In the background through the open window we see Uluru. The Judas character is a Western woman with a can of coke and a hamburger. See also Pearson C., *Hyphen, op. cit.*, p. 21. Pearson coins the term ‘Australien’ as “a sign of wanting to affirm the decision to become a citizen but recognizing that one does not belong to the dominant core; the ‘alien’ ending can also point away from culture, any culture, including the hyphenated identity, to a theological otherness.”


unfounded and unnecessary. There has instead been attention given to developing a hermeneutic that recognizes the diversity of the theological and cultural landscape of the Australian context and experience. In a collaborative work on diasporic theologies emerging in an Australasian context, *Faith in a Hyphen*, Clive Pearson refers to the distinction between theological ‘unifiers’ and diversifiers’, identifying himself as a ‘diversifier’.

The unifier aspires after a grand, comprehensive, coherent system. It is a view from the mountain-top. It has its place and legitimacy. It rightly stands in critical tension with the principle of contextuality. We drifting seeds are diversifiers. We inhabit the thickets below. Our concern is for negotiating our way through the complexities of messy lives. We stumble through the undergrowth and only now and then, maybe, come to an elevated clearing where we can oversee the whole.

My applied hermeneutic of followship, then, is a methodological leg-up to an elevated theological clearing in order to make sense of what it means to follow Christ in an Australian context. By identifying the Incarnate, Crucified and Resurrected One, already present in the stories that shape everyday life in Australia, the followship imperative now demands a response from followers to the Christ who has gone before to prepare a way.

**10.1 The Incarnate One**

The ‘with’ of the expression, ‘God with us’, is by no means only a linguistic device; it captures, so far as language can, the rudimentary relationality that

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informs the whole of Biblical thought. Of all the possible ways of describing the relation between God and humankind, or indeed of all relations, Biblically understood, the preposition ‘with’ is the most satisfactory.\textsuperscript{1331}

The doctrine of the incarnation is an attempt to describe God’s willingness to be ‘with’ us. For God to be ‘with’ us, however, also means that we have to be ‘with’ God. As such, the incarnation is also an invitation. ‘Withness’ involves participation, risk and vulnerability.\textsuperscript{1332} The gospel narratives tell of the Christ who came to the margins and was a friend to sinners. The ‘withness’ of God in today’s world must tell the same story. So when Bonhoeffer asserts that God in Christ is for ‘us’,\textsuperscript{1333} joining in our struggles and hopes, our dreams and doubts, then, the question that we must ask is: ‘Who is this ‘us’ referring to?’ The incarnation has bias; it can never be neutral.

To understand the incarnation as a purely historical event creates a scandal of particularity that situates God in Christ, a male Jew, 2000 years ago in the Middle East, in opposition to God in Christ as an Aboriginal woman living in Redfern, Sydney, in 2013. This will not do, for the incarnation is not limited by time and space. It transforms all of time and every space. The particularity of the incarnation is nevertheless a strength.\textsuperscript{1334} The historicity of the story, locating itself in a specific and place, also allows for the story to be told in other times and places. If the story is to be told in its truest form, it must be relocated to each new context in which it is told.\textsuperscript{1335} Yet it must also negotiate Christology’s traditional doctrinal hinterland relating to the person and work of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{1331} Hall, Professing op. cit., p. 157.
\footnote{1332} Migliore, op. cit., p. 54.
\footnote{1333} Bonhoeffer, CC, op. cit., p. 47.
\footnote{1334} See also Migliore, op. cit., Kindle location 4048-4089.
\footnote{1335} See in particular Migliore, op. cit., kindle location 4036-4501.
\end{footnotes}
Christ. The Christ of each context must be able to address issues such as sin and reconciliation, the ascension and Pentecost, pneumatology and eschatology etc. So, just as a language may be translated in order for a story to be told in different contexts, so too, the very personhood of Christ must be translated. This is the very nature of language games. Wittgenstein reminds us that meaning is found in the way a word is used. The story of Christ can be told in different contexts, using different words, and yet convey the same sense of God’s presence in creation. The Incarnate One may be encountered in many different ways, in many different places. It is the story of the Incarnate One that tells us of God’s presence, not the particular language game that is used.

The purpose here is not to make Christ’s story relevant to different contexts. The desire is not to find how Christ might fit in to the stories that we tell, or that constitute our existence. It is the other way around. Our task is to discover the story of Christ that is already being told in a ‘world come of age’, sometimes within the church community, sometimes without. It is Christ’s story that has primacy here: the incarnate story of God’s love for the world.\textsuperscript{1336}

\subsection*{10.1.1 Aussie Jesus}

“The residue of belief found among Australians is theologically deficient and philosophically unsophisticated – and yet it does not seem to matter that it lacks cogency or coherence.”\textsuperscript{1337}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
The Christ of the Never

With eyes that are narrowed to pierce
To the awful horizons of land,
Through the blaze of hot days, and the fierce
White heat-waves that flow on the sand;
Through the Never Land westward and nor’ward,
Bronzed, bearded, and gaunt on the track,
Low-voiced and hard-knuckled, rides forward
The Christ of the Outer Out-back.

For the cause that will ne’er be relinquished
Despite all the cynics on earth –
In the ranks of the bush undistinguished
By manner or dress – if by birth –
God’s preacher, of churches unheeded –
God’s vineyard, though barren the sod –
Plain spokesman where spokesman is needed –
Rough link ’twixt the bushman and God.

He works where the hearts of a nation
Are withered in flame from the sky,
Where the sinners work out their salvation
In a hell-upon-earth ere they die.
In the camp or the lonely hut lying
In a waste that seems out of God’s sight,
He’s the doctor – the mate of the dying
Through the smothering heat of the night.

By his work in the hells of the shearers,
Where the drinking is ghastly and grim,
Where the roughest and worst of his hearers
Have listened bareheaded to him;
By his paths through the parched desolation,
Hot rides, and the long, terrible tramps;
By the hunger, the thirst, the privation
Of his work in the farthermost camps;

By his worth in the light that shall search men
And prove – ay! and justify each –
I place him in front of all churchmen
Who feel not, who know not – but preach!1338

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Australian culture has not held kindly to the Jesus of Christendom. From the time of the first fleet, that particular imaginative reconstruction of Jesus has been associated with institutional authority and moral conservatism. The ‘flogging parson’ (Rev Samuel Marsden 1765-1838) was known as a judicial enforcer of the colony’s rule. For convicts who were first transported here there was deep suspicion reserved for the institutional church, which was seen as simply an arm of the government.\textsuperscript{1339} English and Irish rivalry and resentment was translated into Catholic-Protestant hostilities and suspicions, and the ‘frontier’ nature of the colony meant that church life was somewhat sidelined. Over the next two hundred years, the story of the Christian faith in Australia is one that may be celebrated within the institutional church, but is mostly treated with benign indifference in the wider society.

In 2006, the ABS recorded that 63.9\% of the Australian population claimed Christianity as their religion, but for the most part Christianity’s influence in national socio-political discourse and public debate is ideologically marginalized and ignored.\textsuperscript{1340} There is, however, alongside the public indifference to matters of faith, an echo of nostalgia for an otherwise unknown Jesus that can often appear as a distant reminder of the Christendom roots of the first fleet invasion: Jesus is the big mate upstairs!\textsuperscript{1341}

As we have previously discussed, people are formed by story. The relationship people have with stories is reciprocal. Creative fiction is also a

\textsuperscript{1339} Frame, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 42-43.  
\textsuperscript{1340} See in particular Frame, \textit{op. cit.}, or for a different perspective on the influence of the ‘Christian right’ during the Howard years, see Maddox, M., \textit{God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics}, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2005.  
\textsuperscript{1341} Smith, J., \textit{Advance Australia Where?}, Anzea Books, Homebush, 1989, p. 29. “There is a longing for the values of Jesus in the writings of Australia’s great agnostics.”
way of re-telling a lived story; it is a way of processing that which may lie underneath. One of Australia’s best-loved authors, Henry Lawson, the ‘working-man’s author’, an alcoholic, and an agnostic, was especially adept a revealing this underside of the Australian story in a way that was both endearing and enduring. His authoritarian upbringing distanced him from the church, and yet the idea of Jesus as, in the words of Bonhoeffer, the One who is ‘for us’, seems to resonate within his writing.

John Smith writes about Lawson,

Strangely enough, he did seem to be drawn to the person of Jesus. He lived through great social unrest with strikes crippling the nation, kids in street gangs in the cities, riots, fights, rapes and racial tension. He spent much of his life struggling with the question of how to create a Kingdom of God without God.  

It seems that Lawson may have been asking this very question when he wrote Shall We Gather at the River?, sometime before 1901. This short story is a third hand account of a bush preacher, Peter M’Laughlan, who ministered in the ‘Never-Never’ country in western Queensland. M’Laughlan is described as a tall, well built man who was familiar with the burdens and hardships of everyday life in the bush. He seldom smiled: “there was something in his big dark brown eyes that was scarcely misery, nor yet sadness—a sort of haunted sympathy”. M’Laughlan paid his own way as he ministered to the people on the land. He did not mind having a drink with the men; he would even swear a little if the occasion called for it. M’Laughlan was one of those

1342 Smith, op. cit., p. 27.
1343 Lawson, H., Sourced online (http://www.telelib.com/authors/L/LawsonHenry/prose/romanceofswag/gatherriver.html).
rare finds in the outback, a preacher who was well-loved and respected: “A bushman very rarely lifts his hat to a man, yet the worst characters of the West have listened bareheaded to Peter when he preached.”

Lawson’s story tells of a time when, during a great drought, as sheep and cattle were perishing in their thousands, M’Laughlan was helping the local station hands pull cattle out of the muddied water holes. Covered in mud, and drenched in sweat and misery, M’Laughlan looks up to see a ‘piano-fingered parson’ from the next town, arrive in a horse drawn buggy.

“Brother,” he said, “do you not think we should offer up a prayer?”

“What for?” asked Peter, standing in his shirt sleeves, a rope in his hands and mud from head to foot.

“For? Why, for rain, brother,” replied the parson, a bit surprised.

Peter held up his finger and said “Listen!”

Now, with a big mob of travelling stock camped on the plain at night, there is always a lowing, soughing or moaning sound, a sound like that of the sea on the shore at a little distance; and, altogether, it might be called the sigh or yawn of a big mob in camp. But the long, low moaning of cattle dying of hunger and thirst on the hot barren plain in a drought is altogether different, and, at night, there is something awful about it—you couldn’t describe it. This is what Peter M’Laughlan heard.

“Do you hear that?” he asked the other preacher.

The little parson said he did. Perhaps he only heard the weak lowing of cattle.

“Do you think that God will hear us when He does not hear that?” asked Peter.

The parson stared at him for a moment and then got into his buggy and drove away, greatly shocked and deeply offended. But, later on, over tea at the homestead, he said that he felt sure that that “unfortunate man,” Peter M’Laughlan, was not in his right
mind; that his wandering, irregular life, or the heat, must have affected him.

As the story unfolds we hear of an account of a time when M’Laughlan came to preach at an out-station church (a slab-and-bark hut used mostly as a school-house when a teacher could be found). The sun was blazing hot, ‘so hot you could cook eggs in the dust’, and yet when M’Laughlan spoke, the people listened. ‘He didn’t preach much of hope in this world. How could he?’ Lawson says repeatedly, for the drought was harsh and life was hard, and joy was scarce to find. But he did preach about God, and he did preach about heaven: ‘And there were men there listening who needed to believe these things.’

Lawson’s preacher is one who knows the people in his care. He knows how to read the people before him, and the context in which he lives. ‘There is beauty even in this life and in this place’, M’Laughlan reminded them, again and again and again.

There is beauty even in this life and in this place. When a man loses his farm, or his stock, or his crop, through no fault of his own, there are poor men who put their hands into their pockets to help him.

There is beauty even in this life and in this place. In the blazing drought, when the cattle be down and cannot rise from weakness, neighbours help neighbours to lift them. When one man has hay or chaff and no stock, he gives it or sells it cheaply to the poor man who has starving cattle and no fodder.

In the midst of the gathering was Ross, who had worked the land all his life in this barren place that breaks the back and hardens the heart. M’Laughlan continues to encourage the congregation about the need for forgiveness when
there are quarrels, and the gift of grace when it is undeserved. After a while, as M’Laughlan’s words like a healing balm began to take hold…

There was a sob, like the sob of an over-ridden horse as it sinks down broken-hearted, and Ross’s arms went out on the desk in front of him, and his head went down on them. He was beaten.

He was steered out gently with his wife on one side of him and his eldest son on the other.

“Don’t be alarmed, my friends,” said Peter, standing by the water-bag with one hand on the tap and the pannikin in the other. “Mr Ross has not been well lately, and the heat has been too much for him.” And he went out after Ross. They took him round under the bush shed behind the hut, where it was cooler.

When Peter came back to his place he seemed to have changed his whole manner and tone. “Our friend, Mr Ross, is much better,” he said. “We will now sing”— he glanced at Clara Southwick at the harmonium —“we will now sing ‘Shall We Gather at the River?’” We all knew that hymn; it was an old favourite round there, and Clara Southwick played it well in spite of the harmonium.

And Peter sang — the first and last time I ever heard him sing. I never had an ear for music; but I never before nor since heard a man’s voice that stirred me as Peter M’Laughlan’s. We stood like emus, listening to him all through one verse, then we pulled ourselves together.

Shall we gather at the River,  
Where bright angels’ feet have trod —

The only rivers round there were barren creeks, the best of them only strings of muddy waterholes, and across the ridge, on the sheep-runs, the creeks were dry gutters, with baked banks and beds, and perhaps a mudhole every mile or so, and dead beasts rotting and stinking every few yards.

Gather with the saints at the River,  
That flows by the throne of God.

Peter’s voice trembled and broke. He caught his breath, and his eyes filled. But he smiled then — he stood smiling at us through his tears.

The beautiful, the beautiful River,
Lawson’s portrayal of the ‘bush preacher’ betrays a longing Lawson has for the Incarnate One, the One who walks among us, and knows us, and loves us. And yet, the agnostic in Lawson will not let himself confess this longing too openly, lest the folly of his heart’s desire leave him too exposed. Instead he writes his story as the third-hand account of Joe Wilson, a literary device that Lawson uses to distance himself from the matters at hand.\textsuperscript{1344}

Lawson’s understated, agnostic spirituality has a resonance with the mythic narrative of the Australian bushman that is as formative to the character of white Australia, as it is elusive in its historicity.\textsuperscript{1345} For contemporary Australia is one of the most urbanized countries on earth, yet there remains a romantic nostalgia for the ideality of the bush. For Lawson this nostalgia gives rise to a deeper hunger, one of justice for the working man, one of prosperity for the down-trodden, one of comfort for the broken. The Incarnate One, God’s presence with us, is as evident in his writing, however, as any sort of overt adherence to Christian doctrine is conspicuous in its absence.

Tim Winton likewise has an astute spiritual awareness. Winton is a three-time Miles Franklin Award recipient, and has been short-listed for the Booker Prize on two occasions.\textsuperscript{1346} Raised in a working class family in the 1960’s, Winton was the son of policeman who, suffering from a near-death traffic accident,
was retired early in his career on a disability pension. A Christian man from a local Pentecostal congregation came to help out the family and started caring for Winton’s father, bathing him and sharing his faith with him. Subsequently, the Winton family started going to church and converted to Pentecostalism. In a 2004 radio interview, Winton recollects the early days of his Christian experience:

Well I guess I just did what my parents did, and if they went to the football, I went to the football, if they went on a picnic, I went on a picnic. And I suppose I just showed up with them. I guess I had instinctively understood that something important had happened in their life, and it had a very practical, human origin; someone had been kind to my father, and someone had shown him a kind of sacrificial side of himself, and that had obviously impressed my parents, and it had changed their lives, and I guess as a little boy I was picking up on that.  

During his adolescent years, Winton began to question his understanding of the Christian faith. He began to read Jim Wallis and John Howard Yoder, and was introduced to a version of Christianity that was committed to justice and peace and political activism. Over the years Winton’s commitment to the church has varied but, throughout, he has always maintained a spirituality that was,

(I)rrepressibly Protestant and anti-clerical and anti-institutional, and ... strangely Catholic... I sort of fell in love with people who were Dorothy Day types and Thomas Merton types.

1347 *The Spirit of Things*, op. cit., p. 2.
1348 Jim Wallis is the founding editor of *Sojourners* Magazine and the author of numerous books on evangelical Christianity and justice. See also *http://sojo.net/*
1350 *The Spirit of Things*, op. cit., p. 4.
Winton’s best selling novel is *Cloudstreet*.\(^{1351}\) It tells the story of two families, the Lambs and the Pickles, who through a series of events end up living together at Number 1 Cloudstreet. Winton’s rich use of metaphor, juxtaposition, and sparse narrative create a tapestry of images and words that leave plenty of room for the imagination. Narrative locations such as *Cloudstreet* suggest a meeting place between heaven and earth; character names such as Fish Lamb invoke latent scriptural memories in the reader.\(^{1352}\) This juxtapositional writing style has a lot in common with our discussion on hyphenated existence: Winton’s own identity is a hyphenated one.

> When I’m in the presence of Protestants, I feel like a Catholic, and when I’m with Catholics I really feel like a Protestant, and when I’m in the country I feel like I’m from the city and the other way round when I’m in the city I feel like a bumpkin.\(^{1353}\)

The characters portrayed in *Cloudstreet* are as hyphenated as Winton himself, and indeed this hyphenation is, in turn, a reflection of Winton’s Australia: it is a pragmatic culture that does not take itself too seriously, and yet intuits a deep unrequited and earthly spirituality. In this way, Winton’s novels, and in particular *Cloudstreet*, seek to reconfigure the national mythology as one built upon a spirituality of community and neighbourliness.\(^{1354}\)

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\(^{1351}\) Winton, T., *Cloudstreet*, McPhee Gribble, Carlton, 1991. Winton’s novel was instantly popular, with its first edition selling out within a few days of publication. In the year 2003, the novel was chosen “Australia’s Favourite Australian Book” in a poll carried out by the Australian Society of Authors in celebration of its 40th anniversary(http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s1001783.htm).

\(^{1352}\) *The Spirit of Things*, op. cit., p. 10. Winton says that the naming of the ‘Fish Lamb’ character wasn’t meant to be so overtly ‘Christian’. Winton’s spirituality comes through his writing in ‘accidental’ ways, because it is intrinsic to his authorial style.

\(^{1353}\) *The Spirit of Things*, op. cit., p. 6.

Cloudstreet is partially narrated by Fish Lamb who seems to inhabit a hyphenated existence within the story itself. Fish is resuscitated and brought back to life following a tragic prawning accident where he is trapped and drowned in his father’s fishing net. Fish’s mother Oriel retrieves Fish from the net and tries to resuscitate him:

Quick heard her shouting at the Lord Jesus. Blessed, blessed Saviour, bring him back. Show us all thy tender mercy and bring this boy back. Ah, Gawd Jesus Almighty, raise him up! Now, you raise him up! Lord Jesus – Whump! Saviour Jesus… Whump! And she made sounds on him you only got from cold pastry.  

Fish is revived, but ‘not all of Fish came back’. He suffers brain damage, and lives in the liminal space between heaven and earth, where he has access to privileged information of which others are unaware. Fish can talk to animals and can ‘see’ in the spirit world and yet is unable to communicate effectively with the other characters in the book.

Cloudstreet’s characters are understated and tragically flawed, and yet hopeful and resilient in the midst of the storms of life. After the prawning accident, and Fish’s resultant condition, the Lamb family lose their faith and move to Perth. The house they cohabit with the Pickles becomes a metaphor for Australian life. Here are people from very different backgrounds thrown together, trying to make the best of their newly constructed, hyphenated community.

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Australian nationalist orthodoxy” that were consolidated by the mythologies introduced and perpetuated by our remembrance of Gallipoli.

1355 Winton, op. cit., p. 30.
1356 Winton, op. cit., p. 32.
1357 Winton, op. cit., p. 69. “It’s like Fish is stuck somewhere. Not the way all the living are stuck in time and space; he’s in another stuckness altogether. Like he’s half in and half out.”
The theology of *Cloudstreet* is not overtly proclaimed. It is grammatically ingrained. It reflects Winton’s understanding of his own Christian upbringing:

> We were Biblically literate but also culturally literate, we understood something of where we were, we had it drummed into us, like grammar, and even if all we did was then go on to reject it completely or partially, we had something.1358

The Incarnate One that comes to us from Winton’s Cloudstreet is a hyphenated Christ. It is a Christ that is not held captive by religious tradition, institutional allegiance, or theological orthodoxy. It instead occupies that space between our own story and the stories of the gospels. Just as the Incarnate One is hyphenated as both fully human and fully divine, so we too find our identity as those who are called to follow Christ from the starting place of our own context. We belong to two stories.

Both Winton and Lawson have been able to identify a spiritual longing in the Australian psyche that resides deep and is often dismissed by the secular world. The popularity of their stories is surely a testimony to their prevalence across a particular Australian demographic. The hermeneutics of followship that we have implemented in our study reveals that the Incarnate One has already gone before us in the stories we read, and the stories we tell, preparing the way ahead. Wittgenstein’s appraisal that ‘theology is grammar’ has also identified the primal role that our thinking about God has in the way we construct our language and narrate our lives. In the work of authors such as Lawson and Winton we can see these ideas coming together.

In Winton’s *Cloudstreet* there is also an Aboriginal character, who along with Fish Lamb, embodies a Christ-figure in the story. He walks upon the

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1358 *The Spirit of Things*, op. cit., p. 11.
water,\textsuperscript{1359} and shares bread and wine,\textsuperscript{1360} and gives counsel of reconciliation where there is family division. Towards the end of the novel, this idea of a common humanity comes to be recognized: “It’s not us and them anymore, it’s us and us and us.”\textsuperscript{1361} Winton’s narrative world imagines a reality that for many is still very foreign in Australia, that our nation could be a place of true reconciliation and justice for all people, and yet every possible future is a story waiting to be told.

10.1.2 The Dreaming

\textit{(A)mong Aborigines myth is as genuine a form of metaphysical expression as Aquinas’s \textit{Summa Theologica} was to medieval Christians.}\textsuperscript{1362}

As a Goorie, I believe that Christ, my Lord and King, must be born in Australia amongst the Goorie church, before the true Christian Gospel can take deep root.\textsuperscript{1363}

The Dreaming is the term used by the indigenous peoples of Australia to explain their most formative narratives. Often the word Dreaming is associated with notions of spirituality, but it should never be thought of as somehow separate from everyday life. For Aboriginal people, the Dreaming is

\textsuperscript{1359} Winton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{1360} Winton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 209.
\textsuperscript{1361} Winton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 402.
the central reality of their lives. The Dreaming stories provide the prevailing hermeneutic through which indigenous peoples interpret their world. 1364

Just as John’s gospel begins with a poem about the Logos, partnering with God in creation, and coming to dwell among us, 1365 so too, the Dreaming stories offer poetic and mythic narratives that seek to portray meaning and identity. In the mythic remembrance of the Dreaming, the Australian landscape is spiritualised and invested with a surplus of meaning. 1366 Because Aboriginal people understand themselves in mutuality with the land, they see their own spiritual identities articulated in these same stories.

The Dreaming saw the human situation as determined entirely by the dispositions of the transcendent agency of the totemic ancestors. So radical was this process of interpretation, and so effectively did it speak to the existential needs of those who made it their world building rationale, that mundane reality, including individual identity itself, almost disappeared in the identification it gave with the numinous world of the ancestors. Thus, for instance, the place of conception revealed one’s identification with a particular ancestor and with the totemic economy whereby that ancestor still lived in particular features of the region: animals, rocks, mountains, or waterholes. This mutuality of life-experience and the order proclaimed in the mythology was so all-embracing that all nature was seen as ‘coded and charged with the sacred’ and the sacred was seen as present ‘everywhere within the landscape’. 1367

Thus, the mythologies of the Dreaming are incarnational in the way they seek to portray the presence of the sacred in the reality of everyday life. They also remind Aboriginal people that they are not alone, and that their lives are endowed with significance. The Dreaming narratives are both sophisticated and pervasive. They provide a mythological framework for how Aboriginal

1364 Patel, op. cit., p. 102.
1365 John 1:1-14.
1366 Cowan, op. cit., p. 74.
people are to understand their past; they also become one of Wittgenstein’s language games in the way they help aboriginal people engage with the contemporary world in which they live.

T. G. H. Strehlow, a scholar who grew up among the blacks of central Australia, tells how, in a typical ceremony expressive of the mythology of the Dreaming, a young initiate was presented with a totemic rock and told, ‘this is your body, from which you have been reborn’. 1368

Post-Enlightenment thinking erroneously associates the word mythology with fairy-tale. Mythology, rightly understood, however, is a narrative genre that seeks to tell the primordial truths intrinsic to a particular culture and worldview. Myths are stories that for the most part remain unchallenged; their truth is simply assumed. For just as modernity is endowed with the mythology of epistemological foundationalism, and post-modernity with the mythology of pluralism; capitalism is built upon the mythology that greed is good, and militarism the myth of redemptive violence. 1369 Mythologies contain a surplus of meaning that explain in narrative form truths that would otherwise defy explanation. Christian belief is interwoven with the mythology of the Triune God who creates and redeems; Aboriginal identity is underpinned by the mythology of the Dreaming.

In relation to Aboriginal mythology, James Cowan writes,

Myth is a way of attaching deeper psychological meaning to the principle of intellectual understanding, whereby such things as modes of behaviour, new discoveries and metaphysical insights themselves are successfully integrated into the overall pattern of existence. In other words, myth is not a reflection of archaic

1368 Thornhill, op. cit., p. 44.
consciousness but a canny device used by most oral cultures to imbue their perceptions with real significance.\textsuperscript{1370}

Myths are the stories that lie at the very foundation of our lives, and the truths they contain, are revealed as much in the telling as they are in the storyline. The following story is told among the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges in South Australia. The storyline is based upon a conversation between Adambara (a spider) and Artapudapuda (a crawling insect that attacks spiders). The story itself is not about talking insects and arachnids; it speaks into the very nature of honour and shame, life and death, and the possibility of resurrection.

Adambara and Artapudapuda sat together and had a talk. They were sorting out what should happen when people became so sick that they died. They went away to think about it for a while, then they came back together again to make a decision.

Artapudapuda said that when a Yura (black man) died, his body should stay in the grave and rot, and only his spirit should rise after three days.

Adambara said no, this is not what he wanted. When a Yura died, he said, he should be wrapped up in a web with a trap door, and the door closed and left for three days. During this time, there would be a healing process and, at the end of the three days, he would come out, just as a butterfly comes out of a cocoon. This is what Adambara wanted for humans.

Artapudapuda, however, won the argument, and the two insects went their separate ways. After a while Artapudapuda realized that his relations were dying and he wasn’t seeing them again. He was getting really upset about it. He was ashamed of his decision which he had made, and hid himself under the bark of a wida [Red River Gum] tree.

Adambara, on the other hand, knew he had tried his best for Yuras and was not ashamed. He stayed out in the open. This is why even today Artapudapuda is always hiding under the bark of a

\textsuperscript{1370} Cowan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 68.
wida tree, whereas Adambara is always out where he can be seen.1371

This story not only provides space for conversations about the finality of life, it also incarnates issues such as the afterlife, and legitimizes questions about the spirit world and resurrection. There are obvious entry points here for a conversation about the Christian understanding of resurrection, but the hermeneutic of followship I am advocating is more than a hermeneutic of comparison and analogy. Of more interest here is the grammar of Aboriginal theology. Myths such as this validate an incarnational hermeneutic to Aboriginal mythology by reinforcing the notion of a spirituality embedded in the natural world. The Dreaming represents, “a supreme interworld of archetypal images which themselves partake of revelation.”1372

In Aboriginal spirituality the Incarnate One is encountered through their relationship with the land. Westerners tend to see the land in terms of ownership rather than partnership, in terms of real-estate rather than identity. Westerners tend to think of their sense of belonging in terms of family, or ethnicity, but rarely geography. Chris Budden draws a comparison:

For Aboriginal people there is no such separation of earth and people. Country is not simply where people live, but who they are. As Ambelin Kwaymullina says: ‘As Aboriginal people, we are a living, breathing, thinking physical manifestation of our land – a thread in the pattern of creation… Country is not simply a geographical space. It is the whole of reality, a living story that forms and informs all of existence’. The land is not real estate but mother, father, sister, brother and family. It/she/e does not exist apart from the people who care for and nurture it, neither do the people exist apart from the country.1373

1371 Cowan, op. cit., p. 71.
1372 Cowan, op. cit., p. 84.
1373 Budden, op. cit., p. 72.
To say that the Incarnate One can be found within Aboriginal culture in terms of its relationship with the land, however, is not to advocate some sort of natural theology. There is no ‘proof’ of God’s existence to be found in the Australian landscape. What there is for Aboriginal people, is a profound sense of identity and belonging, and indeed a deep spirituality, in relation to the encounter they have with the sacred as part of their everyday lives. Aboriginal people survey their land and assign deep significance to every tree and rock, every hill and gully, as though each geographical feature provided a conversation with the Divine.

Just as the Apostle Paul alludes to ‘the unknown God’ in Athens,\(^{1374}\) and Melchizedeck paid homage to the God Most High,\(^ {1375}\) so too, we must acknowledge the faithfulness of those who seek after God; even if God is not acknowledged in ways that are familiar to us. The Incarnate One is found among all who seek truth and justice and peace. The Incarnate One is found among those who seek egalitarian community with one another, just as God has community within the Trinity. The Incarnate One is found among Aboriginal people as they discover their humanity in relation to the land to which they belong. For it is the revelation of God found in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate One, that comes to Aboriginal people in their Dreaming and teaches them a love and respect for the land and each other. It is the same Incarnate

\(^{1374}\) Acts 17:23.
\(^{1375}\) Genesis 14:18-20.
One who comes to us in the gospel narratives, pitching a tent in our midst, teaching us to see the world through different eyes.  

The Uniting Church in Australia recently addressed issues relating to the presence of the Incarnate One in Australia before the arrival of Europeans, as it deliberated amendments to the preamble to its constitution.  

It has been argued that Barth and Bonhoeffer raised similar theological concerns in the composition of the Barmen Declaration: namely that God's revelation could be manifest in people or culture, distinct from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.  

The importance of the narrative of Christ is paramount here. It is only when the story of the Incarnate One is faithful to the story of Christ as revealed through Holy Scripture and the teachings of the church, that the presence of the Incarnate One can be identified.

Budden continues,

We have tended to treat the incarnation of Jesus as a moment or point in time in his life and divinity. We have treated humanity as flesh, blood, and bone, and thus the concern is how Jesus could be born as a human being (the Christmas event). Yet the incarnation is really about Jesus being fully human and, thus, is about the sociocultural and political particularity of Jesus' life.

The ‘sociocultural and political particularity of Jesus’ life’ that Budden refers to, is found in the plight of Indigenous peoples in Australia. Jesus was born as a Jew under Roman occupation, and so all who are born into

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1376 The Uniting Church in Australia has wrestled with the theological orthodoxy of the notion of Christ’s presence in the culture and Dreaming of indigenous peoples before the arrival of Europeans.


1378 Barmen I: We reject the false doctrine that the church could and should acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation. For a critique of the recent changes to the preamble to the constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia, see in particular John Michael Owen’s, A Response to the President, sourced online at (http://cp.unitingchurch.org.au/owen_preamble.pdf).

1379 Budden, op. cit., p. 72.p. 104.
circumstances of oppression and injustice may discover him as their brother. This is not the Jesus of Christendom or Western culture: here the Incarnate One is beside indigenous people in their struggle, as one of them, not as some sort of superimposed Messiah with a Western agenda. The incarnation, then, is more than an historical event, it is a hermeneutic through which we are to interpret all of history. So, when Bonhoeffer reframes the Christological enquiry of the gospels, “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?” he is advocating the equivalent of this very hermeneutic for our own context.

The question which Jesus asked Peter, and others, namely, “Who do you say that I am? (Mark 8:29), must be answered directly by the Aboriginal people of Aboriginal Christians. This question is directed to our Aboriginal context and cannot be answered by the Western society for us.

We all know that Jesus was born into a particular culture (Jewish) before he was recognized as universal. Jesus is both local and universal, born and risen. We would like to experience Christ being born in the Aboriginal soil, not just transplanted. ¹³⁸⁰

The hermeneutics of followship allow us to see the story of Christ in our own lives, not as something that we use to validate our own story, filled with our own individual hopes and desires, but rather as an ancient story of God’s dream for the world that both absorbs and transforms our own. The story of Christ, a story of justice and peace, grace and love is woven into the very fabric of life. To understand the Incarnate One as being born into a world of injustice and oppression also leads us to the place of the cross. It is at the cross that violence and hatred, fear and prejudice are overcome through the power of love.

10.2 The Crucified One

When the crucified Jesus is called the ‘image of the invisible’ God, the meaning is that this is God and God is like this. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity. The nucleus of everything that Christian theology says about ‘God’ is to be found in this Christ event.\textsuperscript{1381}

I do not know what will happen after I die. I do not want to know. But I would like the Potter to make a whistle from the clay of my throat. May this whistle fall into the hands of a naughty child and the child to blow hard on the whistle continuously with the suppressed and silent air of his lungs and disrupt the sleep of those who seem dead to my cries.

(anonymous asylum seeker)\textsuperscript{1382}

The Crucified One is the hermeneutic through which the followship imperative will seek to make sense of the violence and injustice in the world. This principle of interpretation reminds us that whenever the beatitudes of costly grace and discipleship are violated the Crucified One is present. The issues at stake here can not be reduced to mere doctrinal adherence or institutional membership. The Crucified One is found within the community of faith as it witnesses to the world the Way of Christ. It may be found in places bereft of belief and devoid of hope. The power of the cross event is not in its

\textsuperscript{1381} Moltmann, J., \textit{The Crucified God}, SCM Press, London, 1974, p. 205. (Emphasis in the original). (Referred to as Crucified from here on.)

\textsuperscript{1382} Justice for Asylum Seekers Kit, Uniting Church in Australia, 2012, p. 14. This is a poem written some years ago by ‘a prisoner at the Baxter Detention Centre - no name, he has only a number’ Circulated by the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Melbourne.
historicity, for there have been countless victims who have fallen to the tyranny of Empire; rather the cross of Christ reminds us that in the darkest night, when all is lost, we are not alone. God is with us.

This idea of God's solidarity with those who suffer is a well known literary device. It is evident in the work of Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Elie Wiesel. His novel, *Night*, was a record of his imprisonment by the Nazis in *Auschwitz* at the height of the Jewish Holocaust. His horrific account recalls a particular Gestapo investigation that uncovered a weapons stash among some of the prisoners. After a time of torture and interrogation, two men and a boy were implicated and set aside for execution.

The three condemned prisoners stepped onto the chairs. In unison, the nooses were placed around their necks. 'Long live liberty!' shouted the two men. But the boy was silent.

"Where is merciful God, where is He?" somewhere behind me was asking.

At the signal, the three chairs were tipped over. Total silence in the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting. 'Caps off!' screamed the Lagerälteste. His voice quivered. As for the rest of us, we were weeping. 'Cover your heads!'

Then came the march past the victims. The two men were no longer alive. Their tongues were hanging out, swollen and bluish. But the third rope was still moving: the child, too light, was still breathing... And so he remained for more than half an hour, lingering between life and death, writhing before our eyes. And we were forced to look at him at close range. He was still alive when I passed him. His tongue was still red, his eyes not yet extinguished.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

"For God's sake, where is God?"

And from within me, I heard a voice answer:

"Where He is? This is where – hanging here from this gallows..."
That night, the soup tasted of corpses.\footnote{Wiesel, E., \textit{Night}, Hill and Wang, New York, 1985, p. 65.}

The atrocities of the Holocaust, and the nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, among other great human tragedies of the twentieth century became a catalyst for many to herald the death of God.\footnote{See in particular the cover \textit{TIME} magazine, April 8, 1966, which reads in bold red font, “Is God Dead?” http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,941410-1,00.html.} The ‘death of God’ movement, championed by Thomas Altizer and others, was based upon a radicalized theological adaption of philosophers such Nietzsche and Hegel.\footnote{See in particular \textit{McCullough}, L., and \textit{Schroeder}, B., (eds.) \textit{Thinking Through the Death of God: A Critical Companion to Thomas J.J. Altizer}, University Press, New York, 2004.} The claim here was that the idea of God had been eclipsed by humanist rationality and secular indifference. And yet the narrative of the Crucified One, rightly understood, has already foretold the death of our yearnings for a triumphal deity and a \textit{theologia gloriae} that has preoccupied so much of Christendom’s theological contributions.\footnote{See in particular Hall, \textit{Cross op. cit.}, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003.} The cross, then, should never be understood as some sort of victory. It should never be ‘celebrated’ as an event, for it is an ugly thing, a thing of horror, a thing of death.

It is impossible to talk responsibly about the crucifixion event without acknowledging the intrinsic violence and brutality that it embodies. In terms of history, crucifixion was the most heinous form of punishment imagined by the Roman Empire, specifically reserved for those who resisted imperial rule.\footnote{Green, J. in B. \textit{Bockmuehl}, M., (ed), \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Jesus}, University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 91.}
As a theological doctrine, it portrays humiliation, violence, suffering and death as being related to the soteriological work of God.\(^{1388}\)

The very idea of a crucified God demands that the notion of violence, and the formative role that it plays, must be addressed. For Walter Wink,

Violence is the ethos of our times. It is the spirituality of the modern world. It has been accorded the status of religion, demanding from its devotees an absolute obedience unto death. Its followers are not aware, however, that the devotion they pay to violence is a form of religious piety. Violence is so successful as a myth precisely because it does not seem to be mythic in the least. Violence simply appears to be the nature of things. It is what works. It is inevitable, the last and, often, the first resort in conflicts. It is embraced with equal alacrity by people on the left and on the right, by religious liberals as well as religious conservatives. The threat of violence, it is believed, is alone able to deter aggressors. It secured us forty-five years of a balance of terror. We learned to trust the bomb to grant us peace.\(^{1389}\)

Wink is writing about a paradigm of redemptive violence. He describes basic truths that are both enlightening and disturbing. Violence is a primordial Power\(^{1390}\) that seeks to define what it is to be human: we are violent. Over and against this hegemony of violence, however, is the non-violent praxis of Jesus Christ as an historical figure and a narrative archetype, seeking to redeem and transform our humanity. His passion narrative defies the Empire’s demands for violence by telling an alternative story.\(^{1391}\) It is one where violence is confronted with non-violence, revenge with forgiveness, heroism with humility.

Traditionally, a theological analysis of the cross event would normally involve an analysis of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement:

\(^{1388}\) Migliore, D., *op. cit.*, Kindle location 3840-3922.
\(^{1390}\) Power in this sense, as defined by Walter Wink (1984, 1986, 1992), is a confluence of both spiritual and material concerns.
\(^{1391}\) See in particular Horsley, *op. cit.*
the necessity of the sacrifice of Christ (on the cross) as the unique and final sacrificial victim offered to God in order to save humans from the violence of God’s vengeance. 1392

The idea, however, that the Christian God requires violent suffering and death in order to be reconciled to creation is a soteriological oxymoron in relation to the Christian understanding of God is Love. 1393 It is time to move beyond the suffering and violence of the crucifixion event as somehow predestined and intrinsic to God’s reconciling work in creation. Jesus’ death on the cross seeks to subvert the whole notion of violence as a necessary or defendable rationale as the means to any end – in any context. It is in this respect that Robert Schreiter talks of the crucifixion of Christ as a polemic against traditional notions of dominative power, and an introduction to what he refers to as the spirituality of reconciliation.

A spirituality of reconciliation involves not directing one’s thinking along the traditional channels of power, but making possible the springing up of alternatives to dominative power. To counter power with the same kind of power may restrain it, but it does not lead to peace. This is something that the practitioners of non-violence have known for a very long time. But it is a hard lesson to learn. The power that broke the hold of sin on the world was the powerlessness, the agony and the humiliation of the cross. The blood that was shed on violence becomes life-giving, redeeming blood. 1394

The crucifixion, then, is not a sacrificial mechanism for the soteriological yearnings of the institutional church, but rather the deconstruction of sacrifice itself. 1395 The crucifixion event exposes the destructive powers of the Jewish Temple cult and its demand for sacrifice as a counterfeit methodology for

1393 1 John 4:8, 16.
reconciliation with God. According to Rene Girard, sacrifice is actually a
defence mechanism for the community, as a protection against the brutality of
the violence of its own making, by legitimating and institutionalising it.\textsuperscript{1396} The
cross then is a soteriological polemic against the Temple system and the very
law itself. It was the law that sanctioned the death of Jesus, and yet through
Jesus’ death, the sacrificial system of the Temple cult is rendered
obsolete.\textsuperscript{1397} Thus, when Jesus occupies the Temple in each of the different
gospel accounts,\textsuperscript{1398} it can be seen as an act of purification. It is a
proclamation by Jesus of forgiveness as the condition of sacrifice, rather than
the other way around.\textsuperscript{1399}

It is liberation from the principle of punishment or vengeance that underlies
any sacrificial or substitutionary system. The… (ransom or redemption) of the
Son of Man is given to end the cycle of mimetic desire and mimetic rivalry and
victimisation and sacrifice, for with the God revealed in the Son of Man there is
no punishment; there is no violence; there is no need for exclusivistic
differentiation into those who are superior and those who are inferior, those
who are inside and those who are outside. Therefore when Jesus says, “The
Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a
ransom for many,” the Temple and all it stands for is brought proleptically to an
end.\textsuperscript{1400}

The death of Jesus did not occur outside of the law, but was a direct result of
the keeping of the law. It is a total misunderstanding of the Soteriological
significance of the cross event to say that the Christian God demands a
sacrifice. Instead it is God who is the sacrifice, and as such, exposes the
futility of sacrifice as a means of reconciliation and atonement for all time.
Indeed each time the Eucharist is celebrated it needs to be a reminder that

\begin{footnotes}
\item 1396 Girard, R., \textit{Violent and the Sacred}, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1972, p. 8. (Referred to as VS from here on.)
\item 1399 Williams, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 227.
\item 1400 Williams, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 230.
\end{footnotes}
sacrifice will not do, that violence is wrong, that the broken body and spilt blood shared among believers is a call to the remembrance of the One who suffers with us. It is in this respect that we must understand that the crucifixion event does not occur in a theological vacuum. It should always be viewed in terms of the life of Jesus that has gone before.\textsuperscript{1401} It should be seen in light of the resurrection and ascension of Christ that follows. The narrative of the Incarnated, Crucified and Resurrected One seeks to redefine the story of who we are in the world.

Our stories of suffering, of experience of violence and violation, can find their form and their transformation in the story of what God has done in Christ. His passion and death are recounted, not for the gruesome and unjust treatment they were, but as a “dangerous memory” of how God subverted power that was used for perpetuating injustice. The resurrection confirms and manifests God’s power over evil, which is why we are able to read the resurrection stories as stories of God’s healing and forgiving power in the world.\textsuperscript{1402}

This idea of sacrificial atonement was very much a part of Greco-Roman thought and custom and should not be thought of as entirely Hebrew in origin. The mythological theme of the atoning death of a prominent individual for the community as a whole was an integral part of Greek tragedy and philosophical thought.\textsuperscript{1403} What would have seemed incomprehensible to the people of the day, however, was the person of Jesus hanging on the cross: not some mythical hero, but rather a Jewish carpenter of dubious birth, hailing from the Galilean back-water of the known world. Furthermore the crucifixion

\textsuperscript{1401} See in particular Hall, Cross, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{1402} Schreiter, op. cit., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{1403} Schreiter, op. cit., p. 20.
was not some glorious, heroic death but a humiliating, shameful one. It is with this in mind that the Apostle Paul speaks of the σκάνδαλον (offence) of the cross.1404

So, the dialectic of the cross event is obvious from the outset. It is a moment of non-violent surrender in the midst of brutality; it is a moment of reconciliation with God in the midst of abandonment; it is an eternal kairos moment that occurs within the confines of human history; and it is also a moment of grace. Here we have a paradox. This paradox redefines our notions of justice and love, as well as our understanding of community and solidarity. Hamilton Kelly defines this dialectic of grace as,

the dialectic of eros and agape (of self-serving love and self-sacrificing love). Just as the deforming act of desire produced a system of violence based on rivalry, so the reforming act of God produces a system of non-violence based on love.1405

Writing from the perspective of Liberation Theology, Gustavo Gutierrez also challenges the traditionally orthodox notion of Jesus becoming a divine sacrifice on the cross. Gustavo argues that there is a danger implicit in this theological perspective: the idea of God sanctioning the suffering of Jesus on the cross as a tacit endorsement of the injustices of the status quo. Jesus can then be seen as having already paid the price for the sinfulness of the world and, therefore, we are all merely called to endure the wrongful circumstances in which we find ourselves.

For centuries the church has taught such acquiescence, passivity and resignation in the face of poverty and injustice – a political message that the rulers and the rich found ideally suited for keeping the masses idle….. [Instead

we need to have an understanding of the cross that speaks of outrage rather than acquiescence, commitment to change rather than acceptance of the unchanging, engagement rather than detachment.  

So, rather than asserting that God is the grand instigator of the violence of the cross, I am instead wanting to portray God as the victim. Now such a designation does not mean that Jesus is passive or submissive in the crucifixion. Rather, on the cross, Jesus chooses to confront violence with vulnerability rather than vengeance. In so doing the Crucified One joins in solidarity with all who are victim to the oppression of Empire. In order to reclaim this notion of non-violence as an authentic response to violence, however, we must also re-read the passion texts of the New Testament not as demythologised stories that occur in a vacuum of political and religious underpinnings, but rather as myths that are integrated into the politics and religious experience of the existential reality of every human context.

....notions of atonement based in violent mimesis can by no means be taken as the natural meaning of the (passion) text(s). Such "received" beliefs about the significance of Christ’s death in the New Testament are themselves highly prejudicial and derive much more from a cultural history that erected a superstructure of violent logic over its text than from a reading attentive to the actual historical crisis from which it arose.

In confronting the powers and principalities of the day manifested through Imperial Rome and the Jewish Temple Cult, Jesus was defying the dominant power structures of his day that relied on violence in order to control and

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1407 This is of course not a new idea, see in particular Moltmann, Crucified, op. cit., for a thorough Trinitarian perspective on God the Father who suffers the loss of God the Son, and who also suffers the pain and death of the crucifixion as God the Son, and who also, as God the Holy Spirit, experiences the trauma of separation within the Trinity itself.

1408 Girard, VS, op. cit., p. 17. Girard suggests that it is vengeance in itself which must be constrained because it is an unending process....

subordinate. In theological terms, however, the cross speaks to us about reconciliation, because it reminds us that in the moment of our greatest separation from God\textsuperscript{1410} and each other, Christ has gone before us. The cross event subverts the notion of death and violence as separation from God, or even the wrath of God. Instead it suggests that Christ enters the abyss\textsuperscript{1411} – the absence of God – so that here too God is present.

Salvation, then, is offered through the cross event not because it is a magical moment, but essentially because it is a concrete moment. It is at the same time a \textit{kairos} moment – where eternity steps into time and the conflict between creator and created, between all that is infinite and all that is finite, is somehow transformed. It is not the cross that saves humankind, it is the One who is nailed there. It is not that Jesus had to die in order to save humanity, but rather that Jesus had to die because he joined with humanity in life and as such necessarily joined with us in death as well.

The cross event provides us with an upside down metaphor\textsuperscript{1412} that seeks to explain all that we might hope for in terms of all that we fear. It is a moment of conflict transformation, where relationships between God and humankind are not merely restored as though nothing has happened – but rather relationships are renewed.\textsuperscript{1413} This is the power of the resurrection, as opposed to mere resuscitation: this is prosurrection, the power of a new life in

\textsuperscript{1410} Mark 15:35. “At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

\textsuperscript{1411} See Bartlett, \textit{op. cit.}, for what he refers to as the ‘theology of the abyss’.

\textsuperscript{1412} Bockmuehl, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 117 uses the term \textit{upside down metaphor} in reference to the resurrection, however I believe that its usage in regard to the crucifixion is also germane, as the cross has become a symbol of peace and hope rather than an icon of torture and death.

Christ. It is only through the crucifixion that the resurrection is enabled to come to pass.

The crucified people…. the pierced people…. have the power to unmask lies and cover-ups, and they also have the strength to try and overturn history. The world of the poor and the victims is what opens our eyes to the true reality, what triumphs over lies as well as just overcoming ignorance. And then we are better able to understand the revelation of God.

A hermeneutic of followship demands that the narrative of The Crucified One must never be ignored, for it is the story of God’s dream for justice in the world. It is a costly story, and one that refuses to be silenced. For all who would dare to follow the way of Christ, the shadow of the cross may darken their path. It is there, along with all who would stand for truth and peace and righteousness, they meet with Jesus, their brother and their Lord.

A theology of the cross is necessarily grounded in the down-to-earth realities of this broken world. It is inherently contextual. It cannot help but be anti-ideological in nature and a protest against forms of power and might that claim too much for themselves. This ‘thin’ tradition expects to find the presence of Christ in situations of vulnerability, marginality and disempowerment.

It is with this in mind that we now look to the specific down-to-earth reality of the plight of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia. For if, as Pearson suggests, The Crucified One is with the ‘vulnerable, the marginalized and the disempowered’, then surely we will find Him here.

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1414 Much of Paul’s writing refer to this understanding. See in particular 2 Corinthians 5:17.
1416 Pearson, C., Hyphen, op. cit., p. 141.
10.2.1 Welcoming (crucifying) the Stranger

For those who've come across the seas
We've boundless plains to share;
With courage let us all combine
To Advance Australia Fair.
(Australia’s National Anthem)\textsuperscript{1417}

We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.\textsuperscript{1418}

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.\textsuperscript{1419}

In August 2001, the Australian Government, under the leadership of then Prime Minister John Howard, refused permission to the Norwegian freighter \textit{MV Tampa} to enter Australian territory because it was carrying 438 asylum seekers previously rescued from a distressed fishing vessel in international waters. Instead of providing assistance asked for, however, Howard ordered Australia’s elite SAS troops to board the \textit{Tampa}, triggering a diplomatic dispute with Norway, and considerable controversy in Australia’s domestic politics leading up to the impending federal election. On September 11, 2001, just two weeks after Howard ordered the Tampa boarding, Australian television audiences watched in horror as the World Trade Centre Towers

\textsuperscript{1417} Peter Dodds McCormick, 1878.
\textsuperscript{1419} Leviticus 19:34.
were felled in New York. Subsequent associations were then made in the national media between the Muslim terrorists who perpetuated this atrocity, and the Muslims who were seeking asylum as they arrived on Australia’s shores by boat.  

Howard won the election and implemented a new ‘border protection’ policy referred to in the media as the ‘pacific solution’. Large sections of northern Australia were excised from the Australian migration zone, and asylum seeker claims were outsourced to countries in the Asia Pacific region, such as Nauru. Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers has been of significant interest in the nation’s media and political discourse ever since.

The hermeneutics of followship that we are advocating calls us to identify with those who are persecuted and marginalized in their quest for justice. It is there that we shall find The Crucified One suffering in solidarity with them. It is with this in mind that we turn to the plight of those who come to Australia by boat, seeking political asylum. Our narrative methodology in this instance will involve an examination of the role of the Australian media in promoting wilful ignorance and xenophobic irrationality toward some of the most vulnerable and marginalized peoples in our community.

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1422 Jupp, *op. cit.*, p. 197. Jupp decries the policies of the Howard government’s’ pacific solution’. “In its long history of refugee settlement Australia had never forcibly removed asylum seekers from its territory until all avenues of appeal had been exhausted; never transferred asylum seekers outside its territory to camps managed on its behalf and at its expense; never denied the possibility of permanent residence and family reunion to those eventually accepted as refugees; never experienced mass protests and hunger strikes at detention centres; never redefined its borders to exclude offshore territories; and never alienated most of those engaged in refugee settlement work or previously cooperated with the Department of Immigration.”
Media study is a complex discipline. Some theorists would argue that the media follows public opinion, others would suggest that it takes a lead. More often than not, however, analyses such as these reveal more about methodological ideology than they do about the state of the media.\textsuperscript{1423} Whereas it may be truism to say that they media can not tell its audience ‘what to think’, it can certainly set the agenda in terms of what an audience is more likely to ‘think about’.\textsuperscript{1424}

The media can thus often act as a gatekeeper and help shape public opinion. It can do so both in relation to the issues presented and the perceived importance of those issues. Setting the agenda can happen in relation to content, style, and language.\textsuperscript{1425} Where a story is placed in a newspaper, what, if any artwork or photographs are associated with it, and which reporter is assigned the story, feature, or opinion piece, are just some of the factors involved.\textsuperscript{1426} A hermeneutic of followship requires a hermeneutic of suspicion when applied to news media.\textsuperscript{1427} In other words, “Whose interest is being

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Pilger, J., \textit{The Hidden Power of the Media}, 1996, sourced online http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/sr200/pilger.htm “(J)ournalists working within the great media institutions can at least begin to dissect the myths and assumptions that influence everything they do, and begin clearing away the ideological rubble that buries so much real news and truth about the world.”
\item Referred to as the ‘Agenda Setting Function Theory’. I am indebted in my research here to Schultz, R., \textit{The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media}, Tampa, John Howard, \textit{Print Media and Public Opinion: How It All Came Together in Melbourne}, sourced online http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection
\item Lygo, I., \textit{News Overboard: The Tabloid Media, Race Politics and Islam}. (Sydney, New South Wales: Southerly Change Media, 2004), p. 25. “(T)he tabloid, and in particular, the Murdoch press has transformed itself in the last twenty years from campaigning for the most downtrodden in society to blaming the victims or the unfortunate for all society’s ill. Their campaign against asylum seekers, or “illegals” (the legally inaccurate, and preferred term used by the Murdoch tabloid press) is typical of this transformation.”
\item Aslan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 142. “The tabloid print media shaped public opinion not only by choosing and reporting particularly negative stories about Muslims, but also by publishing inflammatory letters, and running opinion polls that asked loaded questions to direct responses in a certain way.”
\item For a particularly insightful commentary on contemporary issues relating to religion and the news media see Mitchell, J., and Owen, G., (eds) \textit{Religion and the News}, Ashgate, UK, 2012. Our particular study focuses on Australian print media, for an analysis of Alan Jones’
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
served with this story?”, must sit alongside questions such as, “where is Christ in this story?”. When we look at the media coverage of the Tampa incident and the subsequent treatment of asylum seekers and Australian Muslims, it is The Crucified One who meets with us in the story the media tells.

In a report titled ‘Race for the Headlines: Racism and Media Discourse’ published in 2003, the Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales stated that subsequent to the 9-11 attacks, Arabic and Muslim communities became the target of racial vilification, negative stereotyping and representations in the media. The Anti-Discrimination Board pointed out that abuse, racial harassment and vilification experienced by Australians of Arabic, Middle Eastern and Muslim background in public places increased as the result of ‘inflammatory media reports’ that connected local crime and international terrorism with Muslims in Australia.

Rosemary Schultz, in her study on the Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media in relation to the Tampa incident, focuses on the editorial conduct of Melbourne’s print media. Her investigation revealed that The Herald Sun, Melbourne’s most popular tabloid, readily used misleading language such as ‘illegal immigrants’ when referring to asylum seekers and gave more column space to the opinions of notorieties who agreed with Howard’s actions than those who disagreed. Schultz also examined the findings of a reader poll commentary as a talk-back radio host, particularly in relation to issues regarding asylum seekers and the Islamic community in Australia see Aslan, op. cit., p. 134-143.

1428 Abdullah, S., and Shahram, A., Muslim Communities in Australia, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2001. p. 207. Brasted, writing before the events of Sep 11, 2001, laments the tendency in the Australian press to treat Islam as if it were essentially monolithic (ie different Islamic and cultural traditions from around the world are treated as though they are the same), and alongside this Islam is invariably always associated with what was happening in the Middle East. “The equation that Islam equaled fundamentalism, equaled religious regimes, equaled Shari’a punishments, equaled the inhuman treatment of women, was mooted time and again.”

1429 Aslan op. cit., p. 143.
1430 Schultz, op. cit.
1431 Schultz, op. cit., p. 27.
taken by *The Herald Sun* in order to gauge public support for the government’s response to the Tampa incident.

In a reader poll, *The Herald Sun* asked, “Should Australia turn away the disputed boatload of illegal immigrants?” Not surprisingly, the resounding majority of respondents [95.6 percent or 13,572 readers] said “yes,” while only 4.4 percent of readers [or 615 readers] said “no.” The paper then asked, “Should Australia relent to international pressure and accept the illegal immigrants?” Again, not surprisingly, a resounding “no,” was the answer, with 92.7 percent of readers supporting the government’s decision not to “relent to international pressures,” and only 7.3 percent of readers saying “yes,” the country should accept the “illegal immigrants.”

The leading language used in the questioning here already pre-empts the survey results. By incorrectly labeling those aboard the *Tampa* as ‘illegals’ rather than ‘asylum seekers’, *The Herald Sun* has had a direct influence on the feedback from respondents. In addition to this, it could also be argued that publishing the results of the survey could have a further effect on influencing the views of the papers readership. Public opinion is never neutral. It was the crowd gathered before Pilate who eventually passed sentence upon Jesus: “crucify him, crucify him.”

The location of the Crucified One, even as a proleptic of the body of Christ, is not limited to an ecclesial location. In this instance, it is the refugees who arrive by boat who have become for us, the embodiment of the Christ story. They remind us that Christ comes to us as the stranger seeking food and shelter, clothing and comfort; It is Christ who has no place to lay his

1432 Schultz, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
1433 Mark 15:13-14.
1434 Budden, *op. cit.*, p. 77 – “…properly understood, theology points towards the location of God.”
1435 Matthew 25:31-46.
head,\textsuperscript{1436} and it is Christ who knows the indignity of seeking political asylum in a foreign land.\textsuperscript{1437}

The public debate surrounding refugees and asylum seekers in Australia is a political one, as is the very definition of what it means to be a refugee.\textsuperscript{1438} It is also a moral issue, for the way a nation treats those who are least is a direct reflection on its capacity to act justly and operate with compassion.

There are numerous studies that point to how, within the current context, refugees are labeled, stigmatized, and made scapegoats so that they can be dehumanized and abstracted, and empathy towards them diminished. Crossing borders and transgressing the maintenance of boundaries, refugees bring into view the contested and contingent nature of national limits and identities. Asylum seekers are literally matter out of place. They do not conform to the established order, and cannot be domesticated; thus they emerge as ‘dirt’ or pollution in need of purification from the social body. Such dehumanizing processes allow for a grotesque inversion in perception whereby the vulnerability and powerlessness of asylum seekers is masked and instead, they are seen as a force of nature capable of ‘swamping’ a country like some human tsunami.\textsuperscript{1439}

In order to try and understand the source of Australia’s antipathy towards those seeking asylum, and because the Biblical text provides our primary hermeneutic lens in reading the world, it is helpful at this point to consider Susanna Synder’s reading of the ‘ecology of fear’ in the Hebrew Bible’s stories of Ezra and Nehemiah.\textsuperscript{1440} Originally, the Hebrew Scriptures told the story of Ezra, (priest and scribe), and Nehemiah (appointed provincial

\textsuperscript{1436} Matthew 8:20.  
\textsuperscript{1437} Matthew 2:13. See also Snyder, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 129-137. Synder gives a helpful summary of Biblical texts and narratives relating to the status of refugees.  
\textsuperscript{1439} Bretherton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 137.  
\textsuperscript{1440} Snyder, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 139-161.
governor of Judah) as part of the one theological and historical narrative \textit{(Ezra-Nehemiah)}. Babylonian forces conquered Israel in 586 BCE, forcing the ruling elite into exile in Babylon. In 539 BCE the Persia Empire defeated Babylon and placed Judea under provincial administration. It was at this time that Ezra and Nehemiah were included among those who were sent back to Israel as part of a restoration programme to rebuild parts of Jerusalem, especially the Temple and the city walls. The story of Jerusalem’s rebuilding, however, also includes direct instructions for Jewish people not to associate with foreigners, and for Jewish men to divorce their foreign wives.\footnote{1441 Ezra 9:1-4, 10-12; Nehemiah 13:3. See also Snyder, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 155-158. Synder looks at socio-economic reasons behind the exclusion of foreigners for the Ezra-Nehemiah rebuilding project.}

The theme of restoration is certainly central to the narrative of Ezra-Nehemiah. For Synder, however, the resulting separatist rhetoric of racial vilification and ethnic-cleansing is symptomatic of a shadow side to socio-political narrative often evident during times of great national change.

Such an emphasis on restoration is, however, almost always problematic as the desire to restore is more about \textit{nostalgia} than renewal. Fear tends to slide people backwards into the familiar rather than propel them forward into the new.\footnote{1442 Snyder, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 149. (Emphasis added.)}

Clive Pearson talks about this concept of nostalgia, in a discussion concerning what he refers to as the ‘criss-crossing of cultures’. The concept of a hyphenated identity among migrant Australians is set alongside implications for a diasporic theological hermeneutic.\footnote{1443 Pearson, C., \textit{Hyphen}, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 5-22.} Pearson writes that the etymology of the word ‘nostalgia’ is found in a Greek compound of two words, \textit{nostos (return)} and \textit{algos (suffering)}. Furthermore, in some European
languages, ‘nostalgia’ is derived from the Latin word ‘ignorare’, from which we get the word ‘ignorance’. There is a sense here that the word nostalgia conveys a spectrum of meaning nuanced with feelings of lament for something that is missing or beyond reach or knowledge. This idea of a corporate nostalgia can also be a dangerous sentiment if it engenders a public resentment towards something that is perceived as somehow preventing or inhibiting the focus of the nostalgia coming to fruition.

With this in mind, Synder suggests that the book of Ezra-Nehemiah holds many warnings for the way we both exegete Scripture and the world. Our hermeneutic needs to be discerning lest we validate fear and prejudice as a legitimate response to cultural change.

Snyder’s concern is that the desire to somehow recapture or restore a ‘mythic past’ can result in scapegoating those we blame for its demise. The resultant ethnic conflict in Ezra-Nehemiah can be understood more in terms of power struggle than xenophobia. There are of course obvious parallels here in the Australian narrative and its treatment of asylum seekers and Muslims. The scapegoating (Hebrew: Azazel) of asylum seekers, like the original narrative in Leviticus 16:8 suggests, betrays a desire to invest public blame in a marginalized group as an act of sanctification for the majority.

Migrants, like the foreign wives in Ezra-Nehemiah, often find themselves caught in the crossfire of conflicts that have little to do with them. They simply happen to embody elements of the groups or issues deemed problematic.

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1445 Snyder, op. cit., p. 154. “(A) preoccupation with religio-ethnic identity led, incidentally, to conscious and dangerous manipulation of the existing scriptural tradition.”
1446 Snyder, op. cit., p. 150.
1448 Snyder, op. cit., p. 152.
A hermeneutic of followship requires a response of welcome and hospitality. It is The Crucified One who is marginalized and scapegoated alongside those who are refugees and seek asylum. For Bonhoeffer it is in the moment of required responsibility and concrete ethical decision-making that our humanity is fully realized. As such, asylum seekers gift the Christian community with the opportunity to become who they are, the body of Christ. In the end, it was not Bonhoeffer’s views on Hitler’s Nazism that cost him his life; it was the choices he made, the actions he took. And so it was with Jesus. The cross is a reminder to us of the direct consequences of a life lived faithfully in followship to Christ. It is not enough to simply discern The Crucified One among those who have come to seek asylum in this country, as though we are somehow standing in the privileged place of objective observers. The way we read and tell the story of followship has direct implications for the community we become.

10.3 The (Pro)surrected One

If Christ is not risen then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain.1450

The resurrection completes the inauguration of God’s kingdom. . . . It is the decisive event demonstrating that God’s kingdom really has been launched on earth as it is in heaven.1451

1450 1 Corinthians 15:14.
Our previous discussion on eschatology and prosurrection in Part Two has already laid the groundwork for our present consideration of the Resurrected One. Resurrection is not merely the belief in some sort of life-after-death. It is a continuation of the Christ narrative; it is one that necessarily includes the joy and presence of the incarnation, and the costly conviction of the crucifixion. The Christian hope of the resurrection is incomprehensible without the trauma of the cross.

The word ‘resurrection’ is a transliteration from the Latin resurgere: to ‘rise again’. It is the root from which we also get the word ‘resurgent’. The word suggests a ‘springing forth again into life’: it represents being freed from the chains of death. Resurgere is in turn translated from the Greek word anastasis (ἀνάστασις) which is used on 40 different occasions in the New Testament. It means to ‘rise up’; it does not always refer to the resurrection of Christ. The early Christians used the word anastasis to refer to a literal understanding of the Christ who rose up from the dead, and also as a metaphor for rising up to a better life. The resurrection of Christ meant that everything was now new.\(^{1452}\)

The word resurrection then, rightly understood, is an invitation to imagine. What if everything was made new? What if the Kingdom of God was here? What if The Resurrected One was standing in our midst? With this in mind, our narrative methodology will focus on the stories we tell one another; the stories we use to imagine a better world, and a different future. To help us in

\(^{1452}\) 2 Corinthians 5:17. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”
this regard, I wish to first consider the 2003 movie Big Fish, based on the novel *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions*.1453

*Big Fish* tells the story of a father and son, Edward and Will Bloom. Edward is a travelling salesman who has a penchant for fanciful story telling – that is, tales of two-headed women, werewolves and giants, mermaids and witches with one glass eye. Will Bloom lives with the frustration that he will never get to know his real father because he believes that he chooses to hide behind a fictionalized veneer, rather than live in the real world. Edward is dying, and Will, now an adult and somewhat estranged from his father, comes home to be with him in his final days in the hope of getting to know the real man, the man behind the outrageous stories. Will hopes to learn the truth of his father’s life. On his deathbed and Will by his side, Edward begins to recall the major moments in his life, his childhood, his first job, his experiences in the war, and how he met Will’s mother. Edward’s stories are filled with fairy-tale characters, and unbelievable story-lines. Will becomes increasingly frustrated with his father’s refusal to engage in meaningful conversation about his life.

One of the stories that Edward tells is of the day he ventured in the house of a witch who had one glass eye. This glass eye had magical qualities and, if you looked into it, it revealed to you the moment of your own death. Because Edward had looked into the eye, and knew of his own death, he found it much easier to face the hardships of life, realizing that, as difficult as things might seem, he was always going to live to see another day.

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And so, as Edward lies dying in his hospital bed, he refuses to let his life end this way. He tells his son, ‘I’ve seen the day of my death and this is not how the story ends’. Because Edward is too weak to tell another story, he tells Will that he will have to finish the story for him. After a lifetime of listening to his father’s creative fiction, Will draws upon the characters and places, the images and themes of his father’s stories, and beautifully weaves them into the concluding narrative of his father’s death. Will learns to tell his father’s story the way his father did, filled with wonder and magic, and in the process discovers that in the end all we shall ever be, are the stories we tell.1454

As we have already learned from Wittgenstein, when the content of our future seems uncertain, it is the grammar of our language games that teaches us to go on. And so it is with stories we tell one another. The stories of The Resurrected One posit hope into the often-benign narratives of everyday life. They do so by imagining a future as yet unseen as though it has already come to pass. Resurrection stories are a proleptic of the Kingdom of God.

In this final section of our investigation into the hermeneutics of followship, we will examine narratives of the Resurrected One identifiable in the stories we tell one another. The grammar of our daily lives are most readily revealed in our everyday stories. Devoid of the sophisticated character and plot development of cultural mythology and published fiction, and the well-hewn editorial policies and invested interests of print media, conversational narrative has a disarming disclosure that circumvents any cosmetic

expectations or presumptions we might have about how a story should be
told.

The etymology of the word ‘conversation’ (*Latin*: *conversari*) shares its origins
with the word ‘conversion’. There is a sense here that true conversation
opens up the possibility of conversion. Conversation in this instance is not
restricted to a particular religious understanding or faith allegiance: it includes
the conversion of hope for the future. The conversations we have with one
another in some ways foretell our future and prepare us for what lies ahead.

The context of the conversations we will investigate centre around the major
flooding that took place in Queensland during the summer of 2010-2011. The
Southern oscillation index for December 2010 was the highest on record,
triggering a *La Niña* weather pattern that resulted in the highest rainfall ever
recorded in Queensland for the month of December. The ensuing deluge
soon filled river systems and water-ways to the point of overflowing, resulting
in catastrophic flooding. By the middle of January, 75% of Queensland was
declared a natural disaster zone, with at least 1.3 million km² of the state
under water, 50 000 homes totally destroyed or significantly damaged, and
5.8 billion dollars damage to public infrastructure.

At the time, I was residing in Ipswich – Queensland’s oldest provincial city. It
is built on low-lying land adjacent to the banks of the Bremer River, making
some areas quite prone to flooding. At the height of the 2011 floods, the
Bremer River peaked at 19.4m; a third of the city was engulfed by floodwater
with more than three thousand homes and businesses directly affected. I was

1455 Special thanks to Rev Dr Doug Purnell for highlighting this for me.
in placement as a Minister of the Word at Glebe Road Uniting Church when
the floods occurred. Over the next few months our church was integrated into
a city-wide recovery programme, cleaning up streets and houses, providing
material assistance to families and businesses, and taking time to listen to
stories. The conversations we had were moments of conversion for many of
the people involved.

This idea of conversation and conversion, of story-telling and story-listening,
is well known as a helpful strategy to offer assistance to people recovering
from painful loss. Story telling can be used as a therapeutic technique for
health professionals,\textsuperscript{1456} or a vehicle for restorative justice.\textsuperscript{1457} In response to
the devastating flood event in 2010-2011, a collection of personal stories from
flood survivors and emergency workers was compiled and published under
the title, \textit{Flood: Horror and Tragedy}.\textsuperscript{1458} This anthology of experiences and
memories has provided an ‘emotional outlet’ for some, and a search for
meaning for others.\textsuperscript{1459} It is primarily from this collection of first-hand
accounts that our discussion on resurrection and hope will begin.

Reading different narratives of the flood disaster inevitably evokes my own
personal memories. Even now as I reflect on the stories shared by these
flood survivors, I find my emotions transport me back to my own experiences
helping families clean out their houses in an attempt to rebuild their lives.

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\textsuperscript{1456} Stone, R., \textit{The Healing Art of Storytelling: A Sacred Journey of Personal Discovery},
\textsuperscript{1457} See for example \textit{Bringing Them Home – Report of the National Inquiry into the
Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families}. Sourced
online (http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-stolen-children-
report-1997).
\textsuperscript{1458} Agnew P & F Association, \textit{Flood: Horror and Tragedy}, Southern Education
Managements Pty T/As ProVision Marketing, 2011. (referred to as \textit{Flood} from here on).
\textsuperscript{1459} Agnew P & F Association, \textit{Flood}, op. cit., p. 11.
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Nothing comes close to describing the stench that flood-waters leave behind; mud and chaos everywhere. Suburban streets looked like a war zones, with debris and memories scattered all over the place. House after house, people wearing boots and gloves and masks, armed with shovels and brooms and brushes, laboured and toiled to clean up the mess.

In the midst of the sweat and smell, someone makes a joke, someone else starts singing, and then someone else starts talking about the up-coming footy season. Strangers and friends were finding ways to cope and comfort, sometimes by trying to forget what had happened, sometimes by trying to remember differently. Some of the volunteers had lost their own homes and possessions in the flood, others of us were not affected in that way, but we all were part of the same story.

For many of the flood survivors, talking about their life and death experiences invites participation in a language game of religious faith. Time and again, throughout the pages of *Flood: Horror and Tragedy*, people share anecdotes of their survival entwined with references to passages of scripture or a recollection of their desperate reliance upon prayer. Peter Granfield from Toowoomba tries to make sense of the incredible loss experienced by his community by asserting ‘all things work together for good for those who love God and all that happens is according to his plan’.1460 Michiel Heyns, a butcher from Withcott, claims that is was the hand of God that rescued him from rising floodwaters in an area of exposed three-phase electrical wiring.1461 John and Kathy Mahon from Grantham recall that as the rapidly rising flood

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waters began to close in around them, they calmly recited the Lord’s Prayer.\textsuperscript{1462} They believe they are alive today because God answered their prayers. In contrast, Marie Van Stratten, also from Grantham, tells how she ended up clinging to a ‘floating fridge’ for survival. As the situation became more and more desperate Marie admits that she even began to doubt her faith in God, ‘there’s a limit’ to everything she says.\textsuperscript{1463}

For all of these people God is seen as their deliverer. Faith is stretched and miracles are declared. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, however, God does not seem to be blamed for sending the floods in the first place. The language game of faith is not always logical or coherent. It does not always follow the same rules and conventions demanded of rational enquiry. It does not always seek explanations in terms of cause and effect. There is something else going on. There is a search for meaning and identity rather than accusation and blame. But of course this is not the only way to play the language game of faith. In the \textit{Book of Job}, for example, it seems that accusation and blame come to the forefront.

For one of the families that I helped during the flood cleanup, the story of Job offered an invitation to question their faith. Job provided a language game for faith when their own existential questioning failed to return any reasonable answers to the tragedy they experienced, and this should not surprise us; it was for this reason that the \textit{Book of Job} was written. Terrence Fretheim calls \textit{Job} the ‘what if?’ book: What if people got a chance to interrogate God in relation to the tragedy that occurs through natural disaster and the like? What

\textsuperscript{1462} Agnew P & F Association, \textit{Flood}, op. cit., p. 198.  
\textsuperscript{1463} Agnew P & F Association, \textit{Flood}, op. cit., pp. 204-207.
would it look like? What would we say? What would God say in return? The
*Book of Job* is the dramatized fiction of such an event.¹⁴⁶⁴ Natural disasters
are part of the suffering that Job endures,¹⁴⁶⁵ but because Job is an archetype
fictional character for all who have dared to question God, Job’s questions
become our questions. We are invited to step into the story of God and Job
as spect-actors. We are permissioned to ask questions, and accuse God,
because the story of Job is the hermeneutic lens through which we may see
the world when tragedy strikes.

But Job’s story is not the only Biblical narrative that addresses suffering. As
we have already seen, the story of Jesus’ crucifixion reminds us that God
suffers too. The Resurrected One, however, comes to us in ways that
transform the suffering we endure, allowing us to remember our suffering
differently. As can be seen in the symbol of the cross itself: that which was
once a symbol of cruelty, shame and death, has become a symbol of peace
and hope and love.

Another family I was able to help remembered the joy they felt when they
discovered that their children’s ‘cubby house’ had been moved back onto its
mountings by some of the volunteer workers. In some respects, the return of
the cubby house provided some sense of reassurance that things might one
day return to normal. These moments of narrative recognition are important
and vital to the way we understand ourselves in times of tragedy, and yet as
we have also seen, the idea of returning has a shadow side. Stories can only
be told forward, even when we remember the past. Our understanding of the

¹⁴⁶⁴ Fretheim, T.F., *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God and Natural Disasters*, Baker
Academic, Grand Rapids, 2010, p. 68.
prosurrection, reminds us that the Resurrected One transforms the way ahead. It is never the same as the path that lies behind. The miracle of the cubby house is that, because of the way it was put ‘back in place’, it will always be remembered differently in the future and, as such, the story of the cubby house is now a story of transformation. It is no longer simply a play-area for children, but a sign and symbol of grace.

Signs of grace were everywhere during the flood cleanup. In Flood: Horror and Tragedy, Col Hart, owner/manager of the Bremer Waters Retirement Village, talked of offering hospitality to those who had lost everything by putting on a BBQ, even as he tried to come to terms with the extent of damage to his own property. Col Hart was not alone in his generosity. It would be true to say that during the weeks following the flood, cups of tea, eskies full of stubbiest, and casserole dinners were offered in abundance. Hospitality is at the heart of the gospel, and in particular, the Biblical accounts of Christ’s resurrection. The Lucan story of the disciples who encounter the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus, and the Matthias prophecy of the ‘sheep and the goats’ are germane at this point.

In Luke 24:13-35 we read a story of two disciples journeying toward the township of Emmaus, who encounter a stranger along the road. Emmaus was the location of a guerrilla attack on Roman authorities as recorded by Josephus. It also features prominently in Maccabees as a place where

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Gentile forces were defeated by Jewish freedom fighters. Emmaus was of particular significance for Jewish zealots. As the disciples walk with the stranger along the road, they share with him their misplaced hopes that Jesus was the one who was going to free them from Roman oppression. Of course, the disciples do not realize that it is Jesus to whom they are talking. This misunderstanding is a regular theme in the gospel resurrection accounts: the risen Christ *incognito*. The point of the story is not that the disciples do not recognize Jesus post-resurrection; the point is that they did not recognize him pre-crucifixion. These disciples imagined Jesus as some sort of military *Messiah* rather than the Prince of Peace. It is in the moment of breaking bread, of sharing hospitality, that the identity of the Resurrected One is revealed in their midst.\(^{1470}\)

Our second story comes from Matthew 25:31-46 and recounts a prophecy of Jesus about the ‘last days’. The story differentiates between those who offer hospitality to ‘the least’ in their community, and those who do not. This story is a resurrection account, for it is the Resurrected One who goes before us, into the world; he is the unrecognized, the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. It is the Resurrected One we meet as we offer hospitality to others, even as he remains *incognito*.

The hermeneutics of followship seek to identify the Resurrected One who has left the empty tomb and has gone before us into Galilee,\(^{1471}\) and Emmaus, and Ipswich, and Brisbane. The gospel stories tell us that the risen Christ is *incognito*. Our task is to recognize the narrative of the Resurrected One, and

\(^{1470}\) Pearson M, in Pearson, C., *Hyphen, op. cit.*, p. 135 “God comes to us in Christ as both our gracious host and unexpected guest who awaits our hospitality.”

\(^{1471}\) Mark 16:8.
as such, to step into this story as spect-actors and disciples. As we do so, the story of The Resurrected One becomes our story, and the Kingdom of God is realized in our midst.

Christology is always contextual. So is followship. We can only ever follow Christ within the concrete context of our own existence. Followship does not concern itself with abstract theological posturing; it is about following Christ in the mundane reality of everyday life. Followship is also about active participation in the story of Christ rather than adherence to a particular ideology or set of doctrines. And just as there are a myriad of Australian stories seeking to name some sort of ‘national identity’, so too, there are a plethora of interpretative influences and devices seeking to shape an authentic Australian hermeneutic of followship. There is no single ‘Aussie Christ’; there are many.1472

This notion of ‘contextual Christology’ is not without its critics. Bonhoeffer himself was alarmed at the ‘Black Christ’ advocated on a particular visit to a Harlem church in 1930’s.1473 But as Marsh asserts, this was undoubtedly because of the confronting challenge such an image represented for the prevalent ‘white’ Christologies of his own context.1474 The universality of Christ can only ever be fully understood in relation to the particularity of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection; the implications of which can only be fully understood through the power of story.

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1472 See in particular Pearson, C., Hyphen, op. cit.
1474 Marsh, CIP, op. cit., p. 59.
Bonhoeffer’s claim that Christ always comes to us as God’s revelation of love ‘for-others’, brings with it a further challenge. The identification of ‘us’ and ‘others’ will differ depending on the story being told, and who is doing the telling. But if the story is to be authentic, that is, shaped by the very story of Christ as witnessed to in the canonical gospels, then it is always a story of liberation and hope. For as James Cone reminds us\footnote{Cone, J., \textit{God of the Oppressed}, Seabury Press, New York, 1975, p. 137.} theology “is not the gospel unless it is related to the concrete freedom of the little ones.”
Epilogue: Follow Up

The call to follow Christ in contemporary Australia is a not a self-evident calling. It is an act of imagination which requires would-be disciples to step into an alternate narrative. The praxis of followship relocates this discipleship narrative inside the story of the Incarnated One, the Crucified One, and the Resurrected One. This relocation is at once liberating and traumatic, for as Jesus reminds us, it is in the act of losing one’s life that it is truly found.\footnote{Matthew 16: 24-26.}

Many Australians have experienced this sense of ‘relocation’, journeying between stories and places, cultures and languages, as they seek to make sense of their hyphenated existence.\footnote{See in particular Pearson, C., Hyphen, op. cit., pp. 5-22, Criss-Crossing Cultures.} Telling stories is not just a way of describing this journey, but it is also a kind of journey in itself. For telling a story takes time, and this is the essential ingredient for all journeys.

As disciples seek to faithfully tell the story of Christ, however, they discover it is the story of discipleship that seeks to ‘tell’ them. The theography of each disciple is thus shaped by the telling of Christ’s story interwoven with their own. For contemporary Australians, this continuing process of telling and ‘being told’ is necessarily different from the way the story initiated itself here generations before. The story of Christ that first came to these shores was spoken with European accents and distorted by the politics of colonialism and the self-justifications of Christendom’s institutional ecclesiology. But the story itself, and the way we tell the story, is intrinsically linked. Which is another way of saying, ‘the way we tell the story matters’.
We all exist inside a world of stories. Accounts of the Incarnated One, the Crucified One, and the Resurrected One are already part of our narrative landscape. *The Hermeneutics of Followship* seeks to discern and interpret this story of Christ, and provide entry points for faithful ‘re-telling’. For it is in this faithful retelling that the followship imperative demands we relocate ourselves inside the grand narrative of God’s coming Rule and Reign. By doing so, the Christ story becomes the overarching ‘genre’ through which all other narratives are told. We thus join the narrative journey of the first disciples on the Way with Jesus.

In Mark’s Gospel, the first one written, readers are invited to become what Boal refers to as spect-actors. Just like Simon and Andrew, we leave behind our nets and our boats and immediately respond to the One who calls us to follow. Just like the blind man from Bethsaida we need a ‘second touch’ from Jesus in order to see things clearly, to experience a second *naiveté*, that we may ‘meet Jesus again for the first time’. We are angered and perplexed along with the Scribes and the Pharisees, and perhaps have sympathy with the desperation and disillusionment of the enquirer who falls on his feet before Jesus and asks, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Just like James and John we argue along the way about who will be the greatest. And all too often, just like Peter in the courtyard we deny that we even know Jesus, and decry the fact that our ‘Galilean accent’ has given

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1478 Myers, C., op. cit., p. 5. Myers also asserts that a faithful reading of Mark’s gospel requires the ‘involvement’ of the reader, as opposed to some sort of idealized detachment.
1479 Mark 1:16-18.
1480 Mark 8:21-29.
1481 Mark 8:15.
1483 Mark 10:35-45.
Perhaps we even find ourselves in the baying crowd demanding Jesus’ crucifixion, or with the Centurion by the cross proclaiming ‘Truly this man was God’s Son.’ For each of us, however, the enduring image we are left with is that of an empty tomb; and the promise that the One we are looking for has gone ahead of us into Galilee, and there we will see Him, just as He promised. As it was with the first disciples, we leave filled with terror and amazement.

Just as the early disciples utilised the hermeneutics of followship in order to discern the Christ story over and against the propaganda of Rome, so too, Bonhoeffer sought to tell the story of discipleship in a world ‘come of age’ as an act of resistance to Hitler’s tyranny. In every time and in every place, this call to ‘discern and act’ is demanded of Christ’s followers. Wittgenstein reminds us that the task of discerning how to ‘follow on’ is not as easy as it may first seem. It requires an understanding of our theological grammar. What is at stake here is not so much the words we use, but how we use them. Words are enacted; so too are the stories we tell.

Followers of Christ must learn to tell their own stories by rehearsing the story of Christ. This rehearsal, however, is more akin to an act of improvisation. As Wells informs us, the script of discipleship may not be detailed for every situation, but followers of Christ are to ‘perform’ their faithfulness through acts of ‘improved followship’, as though they were participating in a grand theo-drama. And just as the story of Christ imposes itself on the way we

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1484 Mark 14: 66-72.
1485 Mark 15: 12-14.
1486 Mark 15: 39.
1487 Mark 16:7.
1488 Mark 16:8.
understand our own theography, it is also proleptic. Followship embodies what Braaten refers to as eschatopraxis: living as though God’s Rule and Reign has already come to fulfillment.

Australia’s narrative landscape is one informed by some of the most ancient stories of all. Dreaming stories reaching back many thousands of years seek to integrate the barren terrain of the Australian continent with a deep spirituality. The mythology of the Dreaming, like the Book of Genesis and the prelude to John’s Gospel, invests a surplus of meaning into the language of story-telling. Ancestral characters become present to the story-teller though metaphor and memory, and the narrative itself creates a sense of identity and belonging.

More recent examples of Australian narratives, including creative fiction, media reporting, and personal testimony also reveal to us the extent to which the stories we tell are imbued with the presence of Christ. By participating in these stories, we discover the Christ who has come to live among us, to suffer with us and die for us, and who rises again to new life.

*The Hermeneutics of Followship* provides a way of reading the Biblical text in order to help us better read the world. By understanding the stories of Christ as The Incarnated One, The Crucified One, and The Resurrected One, already existing in the world, we re-locate the Biblical narratives from their socio-historical and literary contexts, into the existential context of the reader, and the theological location of the world. The followship imperative, to follow Jesus on the Way, is one which we enact in the very telling of our lives. For
this is the hope of the world: that the Kingdom of God, could dare to be told in the very lives of Christ’s followers.


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