Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Theology and Philosophy

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Born in 1906, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the son of a professor of psychiatry. He grew up in academic surroundings and in 1930 was appointed lecturer in systematic theology at Berlin University. Before that he had written two books, one on the church, *Sanctorum Communio* (1927), and one on the Church's attitude towards philosophy, *Act and Being* (1929).

From 1930 to 1931 Bonhoeffer spent an academic year at Union Theological Seminary, New York. After returning to Germany he lectured at Berlin University until 1933 and in that year he made his first attack on Hitler's political ideas. Two years later, after a period spent in England, he was forbidden to teach and banned from Berlin by the Nazi authorities. At the outbreak of war, against the advice of all his friends, he gave up the security of the U.S.A., where he was on a lecture tour, and returned to Germany to work for the Confessing Church and the political opposition to Hitler. He went to Stockholm to meet George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, in 1942. He was arrested in 1943 and during this time he wrote the manuscripts of his *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Two years later, after imprisonment in Buchenwald, he was hanged at Flossenbürg in April 1945.

A general attitude to philosophy

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said at Union Seminary in 1931, 'In every theological statement we cannot but use certain general forms of thinking. Theology has these forms in common with philosophy.'[1]

This statement seems to me to sum up most adequately what has been said about the relationship between theology and philosophy. At the same time I would argue that this quotation could be taken as a headline to Bonhoeffer's own attitude toward philosophy throughout the whole corpus of his writings. From his early writings, that is to say *Sanctorum Communio* or *Act and Being*, to his late statements on religionless Christianity he was never explicit about what his attitude toward philosophy really was, although the lecture he gave in 1931 may help us to understand better. After stating that both philosophy and theology have certain forms of thinking in common, Bonhoeffer continues, 'Thus our next problem will be to consider the relation

1 'The Theology of Crisis and its Attitude Toward Philosophy and Science', in *No Rusty Swords*, London 1965, (cited as *NRS*) pp 361-372, quotation p 366.

between theology and philosophy with regard to the use of forms of general philosophical thinking in theology.'[2] Historically speaking there have been several forms of philosophical thinking in theology and Bonhoeffer comments, 'And it must be confessed even now that Protestantism lacks its own proper philosophical terminology.'[3]

How come? — one wonders. Bonhoeffer explains, 'Orthodox Protestantism took up the old substantial form of thinking [i.e. Aristotle/Thomas Aquinas], and it was Kant who showed its impossibility and substituted for it a transcendental philosophy.'[4]

Karl Barth had found that Kantian philosophy was more suitable to articulate his theology than the philosophy of the nineteenth century, that is to say of Fichte or Hegel. 'In his Römerbrief [Barth's commentary on Romans] and his later writings Barth uses the philosophical terminology of Kant and the *Neokantians* in Marburg [i.e. Paul Natorp], and he is conscious of this fact.'[5]

It is not our business to find out to what extent Barth adopted Kant; that is a task for Barth research. We can only state that Bonhoeffer had an immense interest in presenting both dialectical theology and crisis theology within its philosophical framework, namely that of Kant.

According to Bonhoeffer's lecture, Barth was both a theologian and a philosopher. He was a theologian in terms of his subject, the Word of God, which comes to us 'straight from above'. At the same time Barth was a philosopher, for he had to express his theological insight, and did so in Kantian terminology.

What do we say to this? Bonhoeffer took up Barth: Barth took up Kant. Thus Bonhoeffer followed the philosophical framework of Kant. It sounds too easy to be true!

But, first of all, Bonhoeffer was influenced by many more theologians, particularly in his early days in Berlin: theologians such as Adolf von Harnack or Karl Holl or Reinhold Seeberg — the liberal Berlin School with whom Barth was clearly at odds. Secondly, Bonhoeffer started reading William James in 1931, and respected his philosophy, American Pragmatism — anything but a Kantian approach. In one of his early ethical manuscripts from 1940 he criticized Kant in relation to his understanding of ethics.[6] Then, in 1944, he began to read and adopt *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life), particularly associated with Wilhelm Dilthey.

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2 Op. cit., p 366.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant sought to show that human understanding is limited to the phenomena of sensory experience. Transcendent objects are those, such as God, freedom and immortality which lie beyond human modes of perception and so are unknowable. But it is still important, for practical reasons, to speak of them.

5 Ibid., p 368.

6 Cf. 'Ethik', *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, Vol 6, Munich 1992 (= DBW 6), p 86; Kant is here regarded as a follower of an 'abstract ethics' whereas Bonhoeffer wants to develop a 'concrete ethics'. This he felt is the consequence of his book *The Cost of Discipleship* (p 86 n 91). In the English paperback edition of the *Ethics* (SCM London 1965), the text may be found on pp 84f.

We have, therefore, to assume a development in Bonhoeffer's philosophical theology. With the year 1931 we reach a climax in Bonhoeffer's adaptation of Barth and thus of Kantian philosophy. By the year 1944 Bonhoeffer seems to have had reservations about Barth's *Dogmatics* (the key word *Offenbarungspositivismus*, positivism of revelation, is indicative of his reservations). Bonhoeffer speaks of Barth's commentary on Romans in terms of 'neo-Kantian egg shells'[7]. Instead of Kant, he prefers Dilthey's philosophy fo life and historicism in order to articulate the whole issue of religionless Christianity.

Bonhoeffer's relationship with Barth seems to be important on a theological level which could be — at times — linked with the philosophical level, but in the year 1931 we come across a turning point in Bonhoeffer's adaptation of philosophy.

What happened before 1931?

Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 towards the end of the era of the Kaisers and absorbed philosophical thinking as he felt it was presented to him. He read philosophers of the nineteenth century such as Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Feuerbach and (during his imprisonment) Wilhelm Dilthey in the light of their criticism of the German Idealism of Fichte, Hegel and Schelling.

Through the nineteenth century and particularly in the early twentieth century we come across a movement that was trying to establish Kant anew, that is to say the Neokantians. The Marburg wing of the Neokantians among whom Paul Natorp was a leading thinker, were highly influential for Karl Barth's view of Kant.

Generally speaking the liberal theology of the nineteenth century was influenced by idealist philosophy: Christian Ferdinand Baur from Tübingen for instance took Hegelian dialectic to explain the development of the early Church; Friedrich Schleiermacher could be regarded as half a Kantian, half an idealist philosopher. This, of course, helped to prevent him becoming a target of idealist theology. But against this background it is easy to understand that to criticize idealism means at the same time to criticize theology (Feuerbach on Hegel or Engels on Schelling's existential philosophy or Kierkegaard on Fichte's *absolute ego*).

In his early studies at Berlin University the student Bonhoeffer became familiar with the late period of liberal theology taught by Adolf von Harnack (on church history) and Reinhold Seeberg (on dogmatics).

Seeberg's theology, which strongly influenced the young Bonhoeffer, came in part from a Kantian, in part from an idealist background. To Bonhoeffer, Seeberg takes a Kantian approach to theology when he argues, 'God is the supramundane reality transcending consciousness, the lord and creator.' But how can man understand God? This is the point where Seeberg's teaching of the religious *a priori* comes into being: 'man, [Seeberg] says, is

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7 Bonhoeffer in his letter of 8th June 1944: *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged edition, New York 1972 (cited as *LPP*), p 328.

"charged with the capacity" for "becoming directly conscious of pure mind".... The religious a priori is said to be fundamentally open to the divine will, there is said to be a mould in man wherein the divine content of revelation may pour. In other words, revelation must become religion, and that is its nature. Revelation is religion. But this represents a trend from pure transcendentalism to idealism.'[8]

Bonhoeffer observes an illogical statement in Seeberg's Kantian approach, because Seeberg introduces Troeltsch's idea of a religious *a priori*. This, Bonhoeffer argues, is idealist thought. God could be understood by human beings through their religious *a priori* and not through God's revelation in his word, Jesus Christ. The distance between God and human beings has been bridged by suggesting an *a priori*. To Bonhoeffer the deep gap between God and human beings can only be overcome through God's revelation. This, of course, is not Bonhoeffer's insight alone, but generally of the great opposition to idealist theology as it came into being in the Word-of-God-theology of Karl Barth. To Kant, God as he is in himself (*an sich*) cannot be recognized. Barth argues that God *an sich* cannot be recognized unless he reveals himself. The gap between God and human beings can only be overcome by God. The word 'revelation' takes on a new meaning through Barth's theology. Where Hegel mixes revelation with religion and Seeberg uses the human term religious *a priori*, Barth focuses solely on God's revelation in his word, Jesus Christ.

In 1929 when Bonhoeffer wrote *Act and Being* he had been fully integrated into a movement, which he first came across in the mid 1920s. In 1924 he came in touch with Karl Barth's teaching and it was to him like 'a liberation' (as Bonhoeffer's friend and biographer Eberhard Bethge[9] observes). This liberation helped Bonhoeffer to discover Kantian philosophy anew and to link it with Barth's theology so that with *Act and Being* he gave up liberal theology and thus nineteenth century idealist philosophy altogether. Bonhoeffer followed Barth and Kant and not Seeberg, Troeltsch and Hegel.

An antagonism between philosophy and theology

In the first lecture that Bonhoeffer gave at Berlin University in 1930[10] he stressed the antagonism between philosophy and theology, particularly in terms of the two disciplines following the development of strains of idealist philosophy such as existentialism and phenomenology (Heidegger and Scheler) from the 'theology of crisis' (Barth). The most striking aspect of this lecture is that Bonhoeffer rejects all philosophical approaches to theology

8 Quotations from the American edition: *Act and Being*, New York 1961, pp 45f.

9 E.Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologe Christ, Zeitgenosse* (6th edn) Munich 1986, p 104, *Mit dem Durchbruch der dialektischen Theologie trat bei Bonhoeffer an die Stelle eines gewissen ruhelosen Schweifens eine selbstgewissere Bestimmtheit. Er gewann erst jetzt eigentlich Freude an der Sache; es war wie eine Befreiung.* (cf the English edition of Bethge's biography, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian Contemporary*, London/New York 1970).

10 'Man in contemporary Philosophy and Theology', in *NRS* pp 50-69, (= *'Die Frage nach dem Menschen in der gegenwärtigen Philosophie und Theologie'. Antrittsvorlesung in der Aula der Berliner Universität am 31.Juli 1930*, in *GS* ,Vol III, pp 62-84).

apart from one, namely Kantian transcendental philosophy. (Barth used Kantian terminology in order to oppose idealist philosophy and the nineteenth century theology that went with it).[11]

The antagonism between philosophy and theology that Bonhoeffer stressed in 1929 (*Act and Being*), and in 1930 (his first lecture) was also highlighted at Union Seminary in 1931. In an article that he wrote for *The Journal of Religion*, Bonhoeffer describes the difference between philosophy and theology in the following way, 'Philosophical thinking attempts to be free from premises (if that is possible at all); Christian thinking has to be conscious of its particular premise, that is, of the premise of the reality of God, before and beyond all thinking.'[12] Bonhoeffer generalizes his attitude towards philosophy from 1929 and 1930, when he argues, '...God is subordinated to the ego. That is the strict consequence of the idealistic, and, as far as I see, of all exact philosophical thinking which tries to be autonomous.'[13] Bonhoeffer obviously includes Kantian thinking in the antagonism between idealistic philosophy and theology. Now, this is something new that we have to take into account. We could ask whether or not this could suggest that Bonhoeffer is moving towards a different philosophical framework that he might find more adequate for theology as early as in 1931.

On the other hand he is certainly following Barthian theology in his article. Bonhoeffer picked up Barth's arguments in *Act and Being*, when he states, 'The basis of all theology is the fact of faith. Only in the act of faith as a direct act is God recognized as the reality which is beyond and outside of our thinking, of our whole existence.'[14] With regard to Barth, it is interesting to notice that Bonhoeffer focuses his criticism of philosophy on idealist philosophy (as in 1929-30), 'The idealist philosophy conceives of history as of the realization of ideas, values, etc. History becomes a "symbol", transparent to the eternal spirit.'[15] Against the background of idealist philosophy, dialectical theology argues, 'History in its essence does not enter our system of ideas and values. On the contrary, it sets our limitations for us.'[16]

Apart from observing that in this article, Bonhoeffer does not seem entirely to follow a Kantian approach to theology, I would like to draw attention to something else which reminds the reader of statements from the prison cell, 'Justification is pure self-revelation, pure way of God to man. No religion, no ethics no metaphysical knowledge may serve man to approach

11 *NRS* p 62: '...God remains the eternally other, the eternally distant, even and precisely where he comes near to man in revelation. Barth says, "The man to whom God reveals himself is the man to whom God cannot become manifest." (*Dogmatik* I p.287) ...Barth supports this train of thought from the Kantian idea of man, who only is in reference to transcendence....'

12 'Concerning the Christian idea of God', in *GS*,Vol III, pp 100-109; quotation pp 100f (originally published in: *The Journal of Religion* , vol. 12, no. 2 (April 1932) pp 177-185).

13 Ibid., p 101.

14 Ibid., p 102. Bonhoeffer continues, 'Theology, then, is the attempt to set forth what is already possesed in the act of faith. Theological thinking is not a construction *a priori*, but *a posteriori* as Karl Barth has maintained. Therefore it has to be conscious of its limitations.'

15 Ibid., p 105.

16 Ibid., p 106.

God.'[17] This criticism of a metaphysical framework is significant for Bonhoeffer's late theology. It might be useful to understand parts of what Bonhoeffer was writing in 1931 both in terms of a continuity from 1929 onwards and in terms of a discontinuity from 1944 backwards. The continuity is linked with Barth and the rejection of idealist philosophy, the discontinuity with a condemnation of philosophy altogether and prison cell terminology.

At Union Seminary Bonhoeffer discovered the philosophy of William James. In a review of William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Bonhoeffer comments: '1. It is not true to say that the religious individual does not care as much about the reality as about the efficiency of God. The reality of God is, of course, for most religious people not a philosophical question but a basic conviction. 2. Concerning the term "subconsciousness" we must ask if subconsciousness is to be satisfactory for the religious experience of the outside, then it must be considered really outside of the individual person. But if it is not really outside then the religious experience of the outside is an illusion; if it is really outside then the term subconsciousness seems to be misleading, and we must ask why we do not say: God; which would of course show that the apparent contact with science is illusory. So it seems to me not to be possible to find a mediating term between religion and science.'[18]

Particularly in his second comment on James' book, Bonhoeffer is obviously missing the transcendental aspect, that which is 'really outside' as Bonhoeffer puts it. Subconsciousness and the really outside do not go together and could not be linked within a philosophical framework. The link for Bonhoeffer is: God — really outside, which leads us back to both Kantian philosophy and Barthian theology.

So, what is Bonhoeffer trying to show? First of all, he is obviously trying to defend the theological insights that he became convinced of in the late 1920s against a very different philosophy, namely Pragmatism. But secondly, I would argue that Bonhoeffer is open to new philosophical insights. If he were not, he would not have read almost all the writings of William James![19]

Other comments on Bonhoeffer's theological philosophy

In secondary literature, particularly in the English-speaking world, Bonhoeffer's dependence on philosophy has been emphasised. In the late 1960s and early 1970s a number of essays were written to work out to what extent Bonhoeffer's theology was based upon philosophical outlines.

Henry Mottu, for instance, interprets Bonhoeffer against the background of Ludwig Feuerbach. He argues that 'everything suggests that Bonhoeffer

17 Ibid., p 109.
18 *GS* vol. III, p 129.
19 Bonhoeffer in *GS*, vol. I, p 91, *'Ich las fast das gesamte philosophische Werk von William James, das mich ungemein fesselte,... insbesondere in James fand sich denn auch der Schlüssel zum Verständnis der modernen theologischen Sprache...'*

was, and still is, the Feuerbach of what is called... "the new theology".'[20] Mottu sets his argument in the larger framework of philosophy and theology when he states, 'We are concerned here with the analogy between the Hegelian system and the mature Barth, between Feuerbach's iconoclasm and Bonhoeffer's criticism of religion, between the situation of the early left-wing Hegelians and our own — an analogy, in other words, between more or less conscious structures of thought and actual historical and philosophical situations.'[21]

Bonhoeffer and Feuerbach are put into the larger context of Barth and Hegel, but we have to ask whether Mottu is right to interpret Barth against a Hegelian background rather than against a Kantian. And if Mottu were not right in assuming a link between Barth and Hegel, there would be — for Mottu's argumental circle — no link between Bonhoeffer and Feuerbach either.

Why is it that Mottu argues within such a large framework? To me it seems that Mottu's aim is to set Bonhoeffer over against Barth and uses the antagonism between Feuerbach and Hegel at a philosophical level to achieve his goal.

The suggested antagonism between Barth and Bonhoeffer finds its strongest expression in Bonhoeffer's late writings. 'The originality and interest of the Letters and Papers [from Prison] seem to me to lie precisely here in this transition from a Barthian view of the problem (which sets the theological in opposition to the religious) to a new standpoint which detects the ideological even in the theological.'[22] The difference between Barth's and Bonhoeffer's Christology could be understood against their philosophical backgrounds; '... whereas Barth very deliberately ties in his Christology with God's Trinitarian being, Bonhoeffer appears so to concentrate theology on Christology that the latter seems to end up displacing theology. Thus... Bonhoeffer's procedure here is typically Feuerbachian.'[23] In detail Mottu argues that, for instance, Bonhoeffer's thoughts in his letter of 18th July 1944 were dependent on Feuerbach. In this letter Bonhoeffer describes religion in terms of its particularity, 'To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be a man — not a type of man, but the man that Christ creates in us. It is not the religious act that creates the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life.'[24] The fact that Bonhoeffer describes religion in terms of its particularity does not indicate mere Feuerbachian thinking. The philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*) stresses the same point; it is the understanding of the wholeness of life that fascinated Dilthey most, and which became the basis of his philosophical approach.

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20 H. Mottu, 'Feuerbach and Bonhoeffer: Criticism of Religion and the Last Period of Bonhoeffer's Thought', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol 25, 1 , 1969, p 1.
21 Ibid., p 3.
22 Ibid., p 8.
23 Ibid., p 13.
24 *LPP*, p 361.

I would agree with Mottu that to some extent Feuerbach influenced Bonhoeffer, as did other philosophers of the nineteenth century who opposed idealistic philosophy (like Kierkegaard or Nietzsche). Bonhoeffer quotes Feuerbach in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* explicitly, but he only took up one aspect of his philosophy. In the same way he handled Feuerbach in his lecture on the history of systematic theology in the twentieth century that he had given at Berlin University in Michaelmas term 1932.[25]

In 1944 Bonhoeffer did not adopt a complete Feuerbachian philosophical framework. Dilthey was the only philosopher beside Kant who consistently helped Bonhoeffer to articulate his theological insights during his imprisonment. But before we develop this, let us have a brief look at two further pieces of secondary literature.

David Thomasma's essay could be regarded as an addition to Mottu, for he argues that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche influenced Bonhoeffer's theology. 'With Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer demands a total commitment to God; yet with Nietzsche, he celebrates the death of God!'[26]

The most interesting point that Thomasma makes is that he observes a development in Bonhoeffer's philosophical thinking. Bonhoeffer has not adopted a single philosophical school but a variety of schools. The form of the philosophical argument he uses is dependent upon the stage of his life and work. Using a Hegelian dialectic Thomasma discovers a development in Bonhoeffer's use of philosophy between 1939 and 1944.

In 1939 when he wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* Bonhoeffer was influenced by Kierkegaard. In Hegelian terminology Bonhoeffer articulates here the *thesis*. In 1942 when he started writing his *Ethics* Bonhoeffer was adopting Nietzsche. In Hegelian terminology this means that he articulated the *antithesis* to his earlier book. In 1944, finally, Bonhoeffer found in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* the *synthesis* between godly and ungodly, theistic and atheistic.

Although Thomasma's argument showing the development in Bonhoeffer's philosophical thought (between 1939 and 1944) is clear, he fails to explain what philosophical background Bonhoeffer actually used in 1944. Thomasma does too little in only viewing Bonhoeffer's statements on religionless Christianity as a 'synthesis'[27] coming out of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Stuart Picken is convinced that Bonhoeffer's late statements on a world that had come of age were highly influenced by Kant. Picken argues that there is a link 'between Kant's rejection of rationalist metaphysics, in the first *Kritik*, and his later discussion of man's coming adulthood in *Die Religion*.'[28] 'His first *Kritik* was an attempt to face this problem, to admit that traditional

25 'Die Geschichte der systematischen Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts', in *GS*, vol. V, pp 181ff.

26 D. Thomasma, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Religionless Christianity', in *Revue de l'Universite de Ottawa* vol. 39, Juillet-Septembre 1969, p 407.

27 Ibid., p 410.

28 S. Picken, 'Kant and Man's Coming of Age', in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1973, p 68.

metaphysics was doomed, but to leave room yet to speak about God and human freedom.' 'He found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.'[29] In *Die Religion*, Kant predicted a time when 'religion will gradually be freed from all empirical determining grounds'.[30] Picken comes to the conclusion, 'The thought of Bonhoeffer.., like that of Kant, is grounded in a deep perception of European thought since the Renaissance.[31]

German Bonhoeffer research

German Bonhoeffer research in the early 1970s was of the view that besides Kant, Wilhelm Dilthey's *historismus* and the philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*) had a great impact on his arguments about a world that has come of age since the Renaissance and Reformation.

Dilthey could be regarded as a second Kant, for he developed a *Kritik* of historical reason in accordance with Kant's *Kritik* of pure reason. Unlike Kant, Dilthey could explain the whole issue of autonomy historically. For Dilthey's historicism, humans have begun thinking autonomously since the Renaissance and the Reformation. Since then man has stopped using God as a stopgap; humans have begun to use autonomous reason to explain politics (Machiavelli), law (Grotius), natural sciences (Galileo) and other subjects.

Bonhoeffer read Dilthey during his imprisonment, and as Ernst Feil and Christian Gremmels discovered, Bonhoeffer was adopting the argument of Dilthey.[32] Bonhoeffer began to articulate theological problems such as the criticism of religion within a historical framework. He stopped setting revelation over against religion (as Barth had done) but felt more fundamentally that the time of religion was over.

> The time when people could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience — and that means the time of religion in general.[33]

In particular the historical passages in Bonhoeffer's letters from June/July 1944 indicate to what extent he made use of Dilthey's historical thinking and terminology. One of the most famous reflections on autonomy and history can be found in Bonhoeffer's letter of 8th June 1944,

> I'll try to define my position from the historical angle. The movement that began about the thirteenth century... towards the autonomy of man (in which I should include the discovery of the laws by which the world lives and deals with itself in science, social and political matters, art, ethics, and religion) has in our time reached an undoubted completion. Man has learnt to deal with himself in all questions of importance without recourse to the 'working hypothesis' called 'God'.

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p 69 with regard to Kant, *Die Religion*, p 112.
31 Ibid., p 70.
32 Cf. Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Philadelphia 1985.
33 *LPP*, p 279; Ernst Feil found out that the term 'inwardness' has been borrowed from Wilhelm Dilthey by Bonhoeffer; see E. Feil, 'Der Einfluß Wilhelm Diltheys auf Dietrich Bonhoeffers "Widerstand und Ergebung"', in *Evangelische Theologie*, vol. 29, 1969, pp 662-674.

> In questions of science, art, and ethics this has become an understood thing at which one now hardly dares to tilt. But for the last hundred years or so it has become increasingly true of religious questions; it is becoming evident that everything gets along without 'God' — and, in fact, just as well as before. As in the scientific field, so in human affairs generally, 'God' is being pushed more and more out of life, losing more and more ground.... The question is: Christ and the world that has come of age.'[34]

Reginald Fuller who translated the Tegel letters into English also wrote an important article on the historical dimension of Bonhoeffer's late statements. In this essay Fuller presented an excellent abstract of the different subjects in which man had come of age.

In one sphere after another the stopgaps God has been edged out of the world. We might tabulate his survey thus:

SPHERE	THINKER	CONCLUSION
Theology	Lord Herbert of Cherbury	Sufficiency of reason
Ethics	Montaigne; Bodin	Moral principles replace revealed law
Politics	Machiavelli	Reasons of state replace moral principles
Philosophy	Descartes	Mechanistic universe
Natural science	Nicholas of Cusa; Giodarno Bruno	Infinity of space
Religion	Feuerbach	Religion as merely wish-fulfillment.[35]

Reginald Fuller tabulated his observation in 1966, three years before Ernst Feil published his article on the influence of Wilhelm Dilthey on the letters from Tegel.

One wonders why Fuller, after tabulating exactly what Dilthey's first two hundred pages of *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance*

34 Ibid., pp. 325f., 327.

35 R. Fuller, 'The world come of age: A second look at Bonhoeffer', *Conflicting Images of Man*, ed. by W. Nicholls, New York 1966, p 153.

und Reformation[36] dealt with, did not notice the link between Dilthey and Bonhoeffer.

Conclusion

About the relationship between theology and philosophy. Bonhoeffer said at Berlin University that theology 'uses philosophical terminology and, therefore, depends profoundly upon philosophical concepts.'[37] In so saying, Bonhoeffer repeats what he said at Union Seminary the year before: 'In every theological statement we cannot but use certain forms of thinking. Theology has these forms in common with philosophy.'

For Bonhoeffer philosophy helps to articulate theological insights. During his life and work, Bonhoeffer changed the type of philosophical approaches to theology. In doing so he was always anti-idealist. He followed those philosophers who criticized idealistic philosophy, particularly Feuerbach, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Through Karl Barth and dialectical theology, Bonhoeffer discovered the importance of Kantian terminology and philosophy for theological statements, particularly in terms of revelation. Then, in the early 1930s Bonhoeffer became familiar with a different strain, namely pragmatism. We noticed that Bonhoeffer made efforts to include James in the philosophy that he was used to. That did not work.

On the other hand there must have been something fascinating enough about William James to have made Bonhoeffer read almost all of his writings. That fascinating thing about James was the value that he attributed to life — an earthbound philosophy of life. For pragmatism what is true is what works in life. Could this all suggest that as early as 1931 Bonhoeffer started thinking in alternative philosophical terms?

He referred in 1939[38] and 1940[39], in an early ethical manuscript, to James again; in 1940, however, Bonhoeffer referred negatively to the ethical conclusions that he drew from pragmatism; also Kant's ethical programme, namely abstract ethics, was criticised in 1940. It seems that Bonhoeffer made little use of known philosophical systems at that time.

Then in 1944 he adopted the philosophical argument of Dilthey, whom he might have regarded as a second Kant. Unlike James, Dilthey fitted into his philosophical framework. Discovering Dilthey also meant a greater distance from Barth's theology; Bonhoeffer started shaping his own theology on the

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36 Wilhelm Dilthey, 'Auffassung und Analyse des Menschen im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Das natürliche System der Geisteswissenschaften im 17. Jahrhundert', in *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation, Wilhelm Diltheys Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II. (2nd edn) Berlin 1921, pp lff and 90ff.

37 *[Theologie] 'bedient sich der philosophischen Terminologie und begibt sich hiermit unter den Anspruch der Allmacht des Begriffs;...' ('Thesenfragmente fur systematische Seminare', GS,* vol. III, 161).

38 Cf. 'Protestantism without Reformation', *NRS*, p 115. (= *Protestantismus ohne Reformation, GS*, vol. I, p 351).

39 'Ethik', *DBW*, vol. 6, Munich 1992, p 38.

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Conclusion

About the relationship between theology and philosophy. Bonhoeffer said at Berlin University that theology 'uses philosophical terminology and, therefore, depends profoundly upon philosophical concepts.'[37] In so saying, Bonhoeffer repeats what he said at Union Seminary the year before: 'In every theological statement we cannot but use certain forms of thinking. Theology has these forms in common with philosophy.'

For Bonhoeffer philosophy helps to articulate theological insights. During his life and work, Bonhoeffer changed the type of philosophical approaches to theology. In doing so he was always anti-idealist. He followed those philosophers who criticized idealistic philosophy, particularly Feuerbach, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Through Karl Barth and dialectical theology, Bonhoeffer discovered the importance of Kantian terminology and philosophy for theological statements, particularly in terms of revelation. Then, in the early 1930s Bonhoeffer became familiar with a different strain, namely pragmatism. We noticed that Bonhoeffer made efforts to include James in the philosophy that he was used to. That did not work.

On the other hand there must have been something fascinating enough about William James to have made Bonhoeffer read almost all of his writings. That fascinating thing about James was the value that he attributed to life — an earthbound philosophy of life. For pragmatism what is true is what works in life. Could this all suggest that as early as 1931 Bonhoeffer started thinking in alternative philosophical terms?

He referred in 1939[38] and 1940[39], in an early ethical manuscript, to James again; in 1940, however, Bonhoeffer referred negatively to the ethical conclusions that he drew from pragmatism; also Kant's ethical programme, namely abstract ethics, was criticised in 1940. It seems that Bonhoeffer made little use of known philosophical systems at that time.

Then in 1944 he adopted the philosophical argument of Dilthey, whom he might have regarded as a second Kant. Unlike James, Dilthey fitted into his philosophical framework. Discovering Dilthey also meant a greater distance from Barth's theology; Bonhoeffer started shaping his own theology on the

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36 Wilhelm Dilthey, 'Auffassung und Analyse des Menschen im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Das natürliche System der Geisteswissenschaften im 17. Jahrhundert', in *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation, Wilhelm Diltheys Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II. (2nd edn) Berlin 1921, pp lff and 90ff.

37 *[Theologie] 'bedient sich der philosophischen Terminologie und begibt sich hiermit unter den Anspruch der Allmacht des Begriffs;...' ('Thesenfragmente fur systematische Seminare', GS,* vol. III, 161).

38 Cf. 'Protestantism without Reformation', *NRS*, p 115. (= *Protestantismus ohne Reformation, GS*, vol. I, p 351).

39 'Ethik', *DBW*, vol. 6, Munich 1992, p 38.

basis of the philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*). If he had survived imprisonment, Bonhoeffer might have developed a sort of 'theology of life'.

For us, in the present time, there are two points that we can learn from Bonhoeffer's theological philosophy: first, theology should never be dominated by one single philosophical framework, but rather make use of philosophy eclectically in the interest of theology. Philosophy cannot supplant revelation, but can help to express the revealed word of God. At different points Bonhoeffer therefore finds allies (whether in Feuerbach, or James) but has at the same time to be critical of them. Secondly, philosophy can help to articulate theological insights. Bonhoeffer's theological insight in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* was the question: 'who is Christ for us today?' This theological question implies the problem of correlating christology to modern life. How to relate Christ as the Word of God to modern man and mature life is the essence of Bonhoeffer's teaching of religionless Christianity. The philosophy of life, as taught by Wilhelm Dilthey and others, knows much about modern life and modern man. Thus, Bonhoeffer made use of these philosophical insights to express his christological question. He disagreed with philosophy in terms of anthropology and the question of truth; for Bonhoeffer, as for us in the present time, the question of truth can only be answered in the light of the revelation of God in his son, Jesus Christ.

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