

HISTORY480

Hist480 Category 2: A Historiographical Essay

# Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christian Resistance and Ethics in Nazi Germany

What is the Significance of Bonhoeffer?

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## **Abstract**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a well known individual because of his behaviour during Nazi Germany (1933-1945), but what are the reasons for his fame? Was he really that unique? this paper aims to determine who has celebrated Bonhoeffer, and for what reasons. This is done through examining the two main aspects of his life: his resistance and ethical theology. Using sources such as Bonhoeffer's publications and secondary studies of his life, death and writings, and analysing how they been received by academics and the public since the Nazi Germany, explains why he has been internationally celebrated. Further discussions about the relationship between Nazism and Christianity, analysis of the main churches' and sects' resistance behaviours and motivations from the main churches and sects, and analysis of Hitler's attitude towards them, help to contextualise Bonhoeffer's resistance and identify how he was unique. Investigation of Bonhoeffer's resistance behaviours motivations and beliefs leads us to examine his ethical theology, which was the foundation for his resistance, and reveals what he thought about the Christians' and churches' behaviour during Nazi Germany. Lastly, a critique of Bonhoeffer's reception, particularly the role of Eberhard Bethge in endorsing Bonhoeffer's legacy, explains why Bonhoeffer has been embraced. We know more about Bonhoeffer than any other Christian resister of Nazism due to the quantity and quality of his work, the depth of his ethical theology, and Bethge's role in disseminating Bonhoeffer to the world. This paper reveals that Bonhoeffer's response to Nazism differed from other Christians. The impact his ethical theology had on his resistance, and how his resistance reciprocally shaped his ethical theology, have meant Bonhoeffer has been widely praised. He practiced what he preached, and it is this which has interested many people since his death.

# Introduction

“Who stands fast? Only the man whose final standard is not his reason, his principles, his conscience, his freedom, or his virtue, but who is ready to sacrifice all this when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and in exclusive allegiance to God - the responsible man, who tried to make his whole life an answer to the question and call of God. Where are these responsible people?”<sup>1</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these words whilst imprisoned for his resistance activity in Nazi Germany, before being executed, April 9th 1945, only weeks before liberation.<sup>2</sup> He was a pastor and a theologian who was well known for his writings and participation in the unsuccessful *Valkyrie* 20 July 1944 plot to kill Hitler,<sup>3</sup> which resulted in his execution and martyrdom.<sup>4</sup> Throughout Nazi Germany, Bonhoeffer called for individuals to recognise and live in responsibility, which most Christians failed to do. Not only did Bonhoeffer live in the midst of the *Kirchenkampf* (Church Struggle), he embraced the tensions that arose from it to inform his decisions. Therefore, academics and the public have been attracted to and discussed his life, death and ethical theology, and have substantiated his fame. Bonhoeffer is internationally known because of his unique resistance and ethical theology, which we have access to through Bonhoeffer’s writings and include substantial records of letters, books, manuscripts and sermons. These allow us to understand Bonhoeffer’s profound thoughts and motivations. This paper therefore argues that Bonhoeffer is significant not only for his resistance, or his ethical theology, but because these were innately interconnected and have

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Christian Kaiser Verlag (London: SCM Press, 1953), 5.

<sup>2</sup> F. Burton Nelson, “The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 22; 43

<sup>3</sup> Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 393.

<sup>4</sup> Robert P. Ericksen, “A Radical Minority: Resistance in the German Protestant Church.” In *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich, Essays in Honour of Peter Hoffman*, ed. Francis R. Nicosia and Lawrence D. Stokes (Oxford: Berg Publishers Ltd, 1990), 115.

continued to attract and inspire people universally through the values they promote.

This paper comprises three chapters to explain his legacy, through analysis of Bonhoeffer's resistance, ethical theology and celebration. Chapter one's discussion of Christian resistance and the Churches' behaviour during Nazi Germany contextualises Bonhoeffer's actions and reveals his committed faith and martyrdom for his beliefs. The second chapter investigates Bonhoeffer's ethical theology which is expressed in his work *Ethics*. This, alongside interpretations from theologians and historians, explains the logic and motivations which informed his resistance. Understanding Bonhoeffer's intricate ethical theology assists the examination of his celebration, discussed in chapter three, because he embraces both theology and resistance ethics. This chapter explains Bonhoeffer's fame by identifying his unique behaviour and theoretical contributions to resistance ethics; it uses historiographical and contextual analysis to examine how and why Bonhoeffer has been received, which reveals the applicability of his values today. Particular attention is given to the role of Eberhard Bethge who disseminated Bonhoeffer's legacy to the world.

## **Methodology**

This paper engages mostly with secondary material, particularly works by historians, biographers and theologians, to grasp not only what Bonhoeffer did and thought, but how this has been received, and its significance. Many academics do not emphasise the *Kirchenkampf* when discussing Bonhoeffer's resistance, thus this paper incorporates an analysis of the Christian Churches and Sects during Nazi Germany in order to contextualise Bonhoeffer's amongst them. Examples of secondary materials include Christine Elizabeth King's *The Nazi State and New Religions: Five Case Studies in Nonconformity*, J. S. Conway's *The Nazi*

*Persecution of the Churches*, and Richard Steigmann-Gall's *The Holy Reich*. Secondary sources furthermore help analyse Bonhoeffer's complex ethical theology, thus biographies from Eberhard Bethge, Eric Metaxas and Charles Marsh help determine Bonhoeffer's character, as well as Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith's *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, which includes memoirs about Bonhoeffer. James Burtness' book *Shaping the Future: The Ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* is additionally used to explain Bonhoeffer's ethical theology. Together, these texts inform about Bonhoeffer's upbringing, influences and beliefs, to explain his decisions in Nazi Germany. However, whilst secondary sources are essential to this paper, they also have disadvantages because they are subject to contextual influences. Complications include inaccessible sources and the unwillingness of eyewitnesses to talk, which creates barriers to achieving comprehensive history.<sup>5</sup> These issues are mitigated against by accounting for publication dates, relative historiographical trends, and using primary resources wherever possible.

Primary sources for this paper include celebrations of Bonhoeffer, and a selection of Bonhoeffer's writings. Texts praising Bonhoeffer include Bethge's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Benjamin A. Reist's *The Promise of Bonhoeffer*, and René Marlé's *The Man and His Work*. These help identify why Bonhoeffer has been widely acclaimed. With Bonhoeffer's texts, I have been selective due to the large amount of work available, and the selection was made according to the purpose of this paper. Thus it includes Bonhoeffer's works: *Letters and Papers from Prison*, and *Ethics* because these publications differ from Bonhoeffer's other writings, and are relevant for their discussions of Bonhoeffer's resistance and morals;<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Hoffman, *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945 Third Edition* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), xi.

<sup>6</sup> John A. Phillips, *Christ For Us In The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), 112.

particularly *Ethics*, which Bonhoeffer believed was the most important and comprehensive work of his life.<sup>7</sup> An analysis of Bonhoeffer's theology from these works explains his values and beliefs which moreover help to illustrate his resistance motivations. Nonetheless, *Ethics* is a collection of manuscripts Bonhoeffer wrote but had not completed or organised before his death, thus relies on interpretation and arrangement from Bethge whom Bonhoeffer appointed in charge of his work, should he be unable to complete it.<sup>8</sup> To account for the potential that *Ethics* has been imbued with Bethge's bias, synthesis with Bonhoeffer's other writings, and Bethge's publication motivations and methods clarifies Bonhoeffer's thoughts and accounts for the risk that Bethge's own ideologies were inescapably included.

There are also practical issues that arise when studying Bonhoeffer. Many people have used English translations of Bonhoeffer and Bethge's works, which can cause mistranslations and misinterpretation.<sup>9</sup> To combat this issue, Bethge's editions of Bonhoeffer's texts together with interpretations of Bonhoeffer from other academics have assisted a cross-reference of his theology, to identify the accurate version. Nonetheless, the availability of English translations has significantly allowed his influence to cross national and language boundaries. Another practical issue within the first wave of Bonhoeffer studies was how academics should handle the relationship between Bonhoeffer's ethical theology and historical context. Bethge wanted Bonhoeffer's resistance and theology to be respectfully kept separate so one did not instantly give a tick of approval to the other.<sup>10</sup> However, when

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<sup>7</sup> Eberhard Bethge, "Turning Points in Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought," in *Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age*, ed. Peter Vorkink II (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 90.

<sup>8</sup> James Burtness, *Shaping the Future: The Ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 2.

<sup>9</sup> John W. de Gruchy, "The Reception of Bonhoeffer's Theology," in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 95.

<sup>10</sup> John W. de Gruchy, "Eberhard Bethge: Interpreter Extraordinaire of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *Modern Theology* 23 (2007), 357.

determining Bonhoeffer's celebration it is inevitably his ethical theology and resistance together which account for his celebration.

Ethical considerations are also essential when analysing resistance in Nazi Germany. Identifying issues with resistance and collaboration definitions is important because of the sensitive nature of this topic, especially because these definitions have evolved. Directly after the war there were clear understandings of collaboration and resistance, but these soon became controversial and limiting. Since then, historians have struggled to find an ethical model to determine and discuss resistance.<sup>11</sup> During the 1980s, Detlev Peukert suggested that whilst resistance and collaboration had been considered a black and white issue, it is actually a grey spectrum,<sup>12</sup> believing that behaviours of resistance are not distinct stages but on a gradient.<sup>13</sup> Peukert reminds us that everybody was subject to various strengths of Nazi oppression, which in addition to different awareness, shows that we are in no position to judge or criticise the actions of individuals without understanding their context.<sup>14</sup> Later in the 1980s, Ian Kershaw considered that ethical consideration of resistance should acknowledge intentionality, and the Nazis's consequences for resistance.<sup>15</sup> Werner Rings further developed an idea that resistance was not always a swift or conscious decision, thus definitions should encompass both intent and effect.<sup>16</sup> In the 1990s, Martin Broszat conceptualised that definitions of resistance should also include the ability of ordinary people to act.<sup>17</sup> Finally, in

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Chandler, introduction to *The Moral Imperative: New Essays on the Ethics of Resistance in National Socialist Germany, 1933-1945*, ed. Andrew Chandler (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life*, trans. Richard Deveson (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-84.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Werner Rings, *Life With The Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler's Europe 1939-1945* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1982), 46-47.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Broszat, "A Social and Historical Typology of the German Opposition to Hitler," in *Contending With Hitler: Varieties of German Resistance in the Third Reich*, ed. David Clay Large (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1991), 25.



the late 1990s, Martyn Housden incorporated each of these suggestions and offered a model of resistance inclusively considerate of political aims, personal motives, methods and context.<sup>18</sup> He acknowledged that nationalism, protection of friends and families, and availability of resistance in different social and geographical contexts impacted resistance.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Housden's comprehensive model, which combined these ethical considerations of resistance, is employed throughout resistance discussions in this paper.

## Historiography

Thirty years after the war, there was considerable scholarship about Nazi Germany,<sup>20</sup> but also hesitations to discuss the regime for fear of solidifying it as a cornerstone in national identity.<sup>21</sup> This explains why earlier discussions of Christianity during Nazi Germany focused heavily on the few who did resist Nazism, because historians were reluctant to admit that the majority of Christians did not.<sup>22</sup> This has created an early historiographical issue identified by Robert P. Ericksen as an over-expectation for resistance instead of the acceptance that there was little.<sup>23</sup> We should thus be wary of historians who claim Bonhoeffer represents the *Kirchenkampf* because in reality, Bonhoeffer was rejected at this time and was only post-war that academics and the public began to acknowledge him and his actions, often using him to represent Christian resistance.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the post-war period saw an abundance of exaggerated resistance, because people were “desperate to find some positive legacy from the Third Reich.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Martyn Housden, *Resistance and Conformity in the Third Reich* (London/New York: Routledge, 1997), 167.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>20</sup> Hoffman, *The History of the German Resistance*, x.

<sup>21</sup> Bill Niven, *Facing The Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2002), 5.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Ericksen, “A Radical Minority,” 116.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>25</sup> Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 63.

During the 1950s and 1960s, after the initial over-exaggeration, historians began to pay closer attention to Nazi topics which had been previously neglected, such as Christianity, yet this initial interest was minimal.<sup>26</sup> It was not until the Cold War period that it developed further as resistance became politicised, resulting in parts of Germany beginning to express their resistance history.<sup>27</sup> Following this, the 1960s and 1970s is known as the ‘Bonhoeffer decade’ because publications on Bonhoeffer became plentiful.<sup>28</sup> This is largely credited to Bethge, who pushed for Bonhoeffer to be recognised by endorsing Bonhoeffer and his writings in lectures at theological seminaries, following a concern that they had not been embraced sufficiently throughout the decade they had been available.<sup>29</sup> The uptake of Bonhoeffer studies developed further during the escalation of the Vietnam War, as pastors and laymen embraced Bonhoeffer’s ethical theology which helped them recognise that Christians sometimes need to be involved in conspiracy, and taught them how to ethically be involved war as a Christian.<sup>30</sup> Finally in the 1970s, historians began to embrace the *Kirchenkampf* history because as a generation removed they no longer felt personally responsible or ashamed of the churches’ behaviour.<sup>31</sup> Discussions increased again during the 1990s, following a series of war anniversaries.<sup>32</sup> Bonhoeffer has thus evolved from being historically misrepresented, to being continually discussed worldwide by academics and the public.

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<sup>26</sup> Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 67.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>28</sup> David H. Hopper, *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 15; 22.

<sup>29</sup> Hopper, *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 16-17.

<sup>32</sup> Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 1.

While the first historians to publish about Bonhoeffer were John D. Godsey,<sup>33</sup> Hanfried Müller,<sup>34</sup> and Jürgen Moltmann,<sup>35</sup> the authoritative publisher of Bonhoeffer is Bethge, who was Bonhoeffer's closest friend, his editor and the executive of his estate.<sup>36</sup> Due to their friendship, Bethge was entrusted with Bonhoeffer's writings, giving him access to Bonhoeffer's life and thoughts after his death.<sup>37</sup> Bonhoeffer also sent many of his writings directly to Bethge because he was aware that someone should write his biography, considering his circumstances:<sup>38</sup> "no one knows how much longer things are likely to last. [...] one day you will be called to write my biography!"<sup>39</sup> Although Bethge burnt many of Bonhoeffer's letters in 1944 for security reasons, so relied on piecemeal information.<sup>40</sup> Bethge's post-war role was therefore to organise archival information and evidence, construct a biographical narration, and develop a theological interpretation of Bonhoeffer.<sup>41</sup> Fortunately his place in Germany meant he lived through Nazi Germany, and was in close proximity to the sources required to reconstruct Bonhoeffer's life,<sup>42</sup> enabling him to accurately understand and disseminate Bonhoeffer to the world.

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<sup>33</sup> de Gruchy discusses that Godsey managed to publish works before Bethge did, yet Bethge endorsed Godsey's work as being accurate and credible. For more on this, see: de Gruchy, "Eberhard Bethge," 357.

<sup>34</sup> Eberhard Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (London: Collins, 1975), 23.

<sup>35</sup> Hopper, *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> de Gruchy, "Eberhard Bethge," 349.

<sup>37</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott & William T. Cavanaugh (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 138.

<sup>38</sup> de Gruchy, "Eberhard Bethge," 353-354.

<sup>39</sup> Bethge, *Letters and Papers*, 202

<sup>40</sup> de Gruchy, "Eberhard Bethge," 355.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

## Chapter One

# Christian Resistance In Nazi Germany

The Christian Church, during the Nazi regime, was characterised by fear, avoidance of responsibility and a desire for survival, and most churches offered little resistance. From 1933 to 1945, Christians largely accommodated Nazism.<sup>43</sup> Moltmann argues that resistance against unjust regimes is a requirement derived from the Christian command to love your neighbour;<sup>44</sup> but this was not often acted on by the Christian churches during the regime. Throughout Hitler's rule, ninety-five percent of German citizens were Christians,<sup>45</sup> and whilst some were brave enough to resist by hiding Jews and refusing to join the Nazi party, the majority did little more than refuse to fly the flag, or perform the 'Heil Hitler' salute.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, there was an expectation that the churches would fight against Nazism's oppression because of its moral responsibility as a sacred institution;<sup>47</sup> the churches neglect of this responsibility could theoretically be considered as heretical,<sup>48</sup> and be considered to be counter to their faith. Additionally, the inability of resistance movements to differentiate from, and position themselves against the regime meant they lacked foreign support, and were rarely committed to resistance.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the most determined resistance came from

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<sup>43</sup> Dietrich, "Christianity in the Third Reich," 11.

<sup>44</sup> Werner G. Jeanrond, "From Resistance to Liberation Theology: German Theologians and the Non Resistance to the National Socialist Regime," in *Resistance Against The Third Reich, 1933-1990*, ed. Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 303.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen W. Eldridge, "Ideological Incompatibility: The Forced Fusion of Nazism and Protestant Theology and Its Impact on Anti-Semitism in the Third Reich," *International Social Science Review* 81 (2006), 152.

<sup>46</sup> Hoffman, *The History of the German Resistance*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Klemens Von Klemperer, *German Resistance Against Hitler: The Search For Allies Abroad 1938-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 37.

<sup>48</sup> Jeanrond, "From Resistance to Liberation Theology," 304.

<sup>49</sup> Shelley Baranowski, "Consent and Dissent: The Confessing Church and Conservative Opposition to National Socialism," *The Journal of Modern History* 59 (1987), 76.

Christian individuals such as Bonhoeffer, rather than from the Christian institutions; hence the lack of resistance history prior to the 1970s because there was seemingly little to report.<sup>50</sup>

Despite Nazism being depicted as strongly anti-Christian,<sup>51</sup> its attitude towards Christianity was characterised by ambiguity as many of Hitler's policies and statements implied respect and co-habitation for the churches. However, there were also several Nazis who were firmly anti-Christian, such as Heinrich Himmler.<sup>52</sup> Himmler hated Christianity due to his belief that it manipulated religion and institutional enemies.<sup>53</sup> Alternatively, Hitler repeatedly communicated respect and support towards the Christian faith: "we insist upon freedom for all religious confessions in the state, providing they do not endanger its existence or offend the German race's sense of decency and morality. The [Nazi] Party stands for a positive Christianity."<sup>54</sup> This is one of many documents from Hitler which gave the impression of state and church interrelations and partnership.<sup>55</sup> Hitler also stated "the strong state must welcome the chance to lend its support to those religious groupings which, for their part, can be useful to it."<sup>56</sup> There were elements of Nazism that were congruent with Christianity, especially in the 'Positive Christianity' movement which claimed that Nazism and anti-Semitism were actions from a Christian understanding and cure for Germany's problems.<sup>57</sup> Hitler never publicly denounced Christianity, which added to the churches false

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<sup>50</sup> John S. Conway, "The Historiography of the German Church Struggle," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 32 (1964), 221.

<sup>51</sup> Richard J. Evans, "Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42 (2007), 5.

<sup>52</sup> Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 259.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>54</sup> "Programme of the NSADP, 1920," in *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, ed. Peter Matheson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 1.

<sup>55</sup> For more information, see: Peter Matheson, *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981).

<sup>56</sup> "Radio Broadcast by Hitler on the Church Elections, 22 July 1933," in *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, ed. Peter Matheson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 28.

<sup>57</sup> Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 10.

hope of co-habitation.<sup>58</sup> Despite this, Steigmann-Gall explains that Christianity and Nazism were rival institutions with ultimately incompatible theories, which prohibited their close co-operation,<sup>59</sup> because, as Robert P. Ericksen explains, one was moral, and the other immoral.<sup>60</sup> Towards the end of the regime, Nazism grew and became explicit about its disapproval of Christianity, because Hitler became rapidly aggravated with anyone who resisted Nazism.<sup>61</sup> Hitler's supportive intentions mixed with the churches' acquiescence therefore created miscommunication, confusion and vague attitudes between the two. The churches, because of their undecided position towards Nazism, began to judge one another to determine the appropriate response to the regime.<sup>62</sup> Christians were quick to comply with the state and believe Hitler's assurances because they were either seduced or confused by the state due to the impact of liberalism from Weimar Germany.<sup>63</sup> Between this and Hitler's claims to support Christianity, we can see why the majority of Christians were hesitant to resist, and the churches were ambiguous about their beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, towards the end of the regime, there was a pro-Nazi element in the churches, but not a pro-Christian element in Nazism despite its implied support for Christianity.<sup>64</sup>

During Nazi Germany, confusion regarding Hitler and the Nazi's positions towards Christianity meant the Christian Churches developed optimism that accommodation of the regime would enable their survival. Many Christians thus welcomed the rise of Hitler,<sup>65</sup> and

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<sup>58</sup> Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, 142.

<sup>59</sup> Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 264.

<sup>60</sup> Ericksen, "A Radical Minority," 115.

<sup>61</sup> Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 265.

<sup>62</sup> John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), xviii.

<sup>63</sup> Paul R. Hinlicky, *Before Auschwitz: What Christian Theology Must Learn From The Rise Of Nazism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 9-10.

<sup>64</sup> Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 265.

<sup>65</sup> Ericksen, "A Radical Minority," 115.

were reluctant to resist.<sup>66</sup> During the regime, many Christians believed that Nazism was in line with Christian ideals,<sup>67</sup> and was compatible with Christianity, a belief commonly held, as is highlighted in a contemporary newspaper:

There are still people left who sincerely doubt that Nazism is seeking to liquidate Christianity. They believe that Hitler is not persecuting religion, but trying simply to enforce a policy of separation of religion from all strictly non-religious activities.<sup>68</sup>

This was particularly true with evangelical Christians who were loyal to the state and prioritised respect for authority, so accepted the Nazis without protest.<sup>69</sup> They believed that Christianity and Nazism could stand together, thus were usually absorbed into the German Church under state control.<sup>70</sup> The churchmen who did resist, found themselves in isolation and doubt because there were so few of them.<sup>71</sup> Thus, whilst the main churches and the sects differed slightly in their attitudes, with the exception of the Jehovah's Witnesses, both leaned towards survival rather than compliance. Because institutional church resistance was motivated by self-defence,<sup>72</sup> the churches had to decide what to give up, what to fight for, and at what cost.<sup>73</sup> As King explains, some churches cared about worship and some about theology, so each developed a survival strategy based on their priorities.<sup>74</sup> We can therefore see that instead of resistance strategies, the churches had survival strategies, or they were blissfully unaware and confused about the regime's attitudes. Based on the belief that Hitler

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<sup>66</sup> Christine Elizabeth King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions: Five Case Studies in Non-Conformity* (Dyfed: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 1982), 175.

<sup>67</sup> Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Otto of Austria, "Christianity and National-Socialism," *World Affairs* 105 (1942), 77.

<sup>69</sup> King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions*, 12.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>71</sup> Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 220.

<sup>72</sup> Günther van Norden, "Opposition by Churches and Christians," in *Encyclopedia of German Resistance to the Nazi Movement*, ed. Wolfgang Benz and Walter H. Poole (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 53.

<sup>73</sup> King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions*, xi.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

would leave them alone, the churches thought survival was realistically attainable, and had a misplaced hope that coexistence was possible, so most Christians were compliant.<sup>75</sup>

Due to complications in determining Nazism's attitude towards Christianity, the Christian Churches remained spiritually focused and distanced themselves from politics as a survival strategy, resulting in accommodation of Nazism.<sup>76</sup> The two main Christian Churches, the Catholics and the Protestants, were disengaged from resistance unless it was in accordance with self-protection. Firstly, the Catholics believed that accommodation of Nazism meant they could retain safety and church rights.<sup>77</sup> Whilst they protested on one issue, sterilisation in 1933, there was little resistance beyond this.<sup>78</sup> They appeared more concerned about maintaining traditions such as having crucifixes in their schools, than they were about the injustices of Nazism.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, because no bishops developed committed resistance it is not surprising that the Catholic congregation were also limited in their resistance.<sup>80</sup>

The other major church, the Lutheran Protestant Church, were in a difficult position because of their traditional respectful attitude towards the state.<sup>81</sup> During the regime they split into the Nazified German Church, and the remaining minority formed the splinter group, The Confessing Church, which engaged in resistance by protesting state interference in the church.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, the motivations of the Confessing Church were responsive to internal

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<sup>75</sup> Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 75.

<sup>76</sup> von Klemperer, *German Resistance Against Hitler*, 39.

<sup>77</sup> Housden, *Resistance and Conformity in the Third Reich*, 50; 53.

<sup>78</sup> Hoffman, *The History of the German Resistance*, 14.

<sup>79</sup> van Norden, "Opposition by Churches and Christians," 54.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Phayer, "Questions About Catholic Resistance," *Church History* 70 (2001), 332.

<sup>81</sup> Raffael Scheck, *Germany, 1871-1945: A Concise History* (New York: Berg, 2008), 162.

<sup>82</sup> Gabrielle R. Yonan, "Spiritual Resistance of Christian Conviction in Nazi Germany: The Case of the Jehovah's Witnesses," *Journal of Church and State* 41 (1999), 313.



church struggles rather than moral disagreement with Nazism,<sup>83</sup> fighting for their own integrity, organisation and independence.<sup>84</sup> This is exemplified with the collaborative effort of 320 Protestant Reform elders and ministers from 167 congregations in Germany.<sup>85</sup> These Christians came together with Karl Barth to speak out against the German Church with The Barmen Confession which was drafted and ratified in 1934.<sup>86</sup> They insisted that Protestantism and Nazism were incompatible because God should remain at the head of the church, not Hitler.<sup>87</sup> This declaration became the one followed by the Confessing Church because it reaffirmed orthodox views.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately though, it did nothing about the persecution of Jews or state oppression.<sup>89</sup> Whilst the motivations for this declaration were in line with resistance, it was limited because it was supported by relatively few Christians,<sup>90</sup> and was manipulated by other churches for institutional protection purposes.<sup>91</sup> The Barmen Confession was also reluctant to directly oppose the state, and it disregarded the oppression of the Jews.<sup>92</sup> Protestant resistance therefore was minimal because instead of ethical or moral motivations, its motivations were to cleanse its churches and restore privileges, which they believed Hitler would enable them do through political and national power.<sup>93</sup> Overall, the two main churches of Germany offered very little resistance, and what they did offer, was usually for religious gains rather than a disagreement with Nazism or a moral desire to overthrow the regime.

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<sup>83</sup> King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions*, 11.

<sup>84</sup> Yonan, "Spiritual Resistance," 315.

<sup>85</sup> Eldridge, "Ideological Incompatibility," 160.

<sup>86</sup> Jeanrond, "From Resistance to Liberation Theology," 295.

<sup>87</sup> Eldridge, "Ideological Incompatibility," 160.

<sup>88</sup> Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 121.

<sup>89</sup> Ericksen, "A Radical Minority," 121.

<sup>90</sup> Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 96.

<sup>91</sup> Eldridge, "Ideological Incompatibility," 161.

<sup>92</sup> Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 99.

<sup>93</sup> Yonan, "Spiritual Resistance," 311-312.

The Christian Sects' resistance strategies were also largely concerned with survival, differing only because they were less politically involved in the state than the major churches.<sup>94</sup> The exception to this were the Jehovahs Witnesses, one of the few Christian groups who faithfully committed to resistance.<sup>95</sup> The Witnesses did not tolerate allegiance to the Nazis, thus fought full-heartedly against them.<sup>96</sup> After the sect was banned in 1933 they moved underground and underwent severe persecution, thus by 1933 had already proportionally lost a huge number of members; from approximately 20,000 Christians, 6,019 were put in concentration camps, 8917 imprisoned and 203 executed.<sup>97</sup> Regardless of this persecution, they continued to involve themselves in resistance,<sup>98</sup> believing there was a purpose for their suffering.<sup>99</sup> The Witnesses differed from the main churches because of Hitler's attitude towards them. Hitler persecuted the Witnesses because he perceived them as political threat,<sup>100</sup> which inevitably created martyrs within the faith as Christians clung to their faith, despite humiliation, terror, threats and torture from Nazism.<sup>101</sup> They persistently defended the faith through resistance, despite severe consequences.<sup>102</sup> The Witnesses illustrated that the size of the church need not dictate the size of resistance.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, the strength of a church's morals and contextual persecution are crucial to understanding Christian resistance behaviour.<sup>104</sup> Whilst the Witnesses need to be recognised, we must also

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<sup>94</sup> Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 196.

<sup>95</sup> Yonan, "Spiritual Resistance," 309.

<sup>96</sup> King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions*, 167.

<sup>97</sup> Yonan, "Spiritual Resistance," 310.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>100</sup> Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 196.

<sup>101</sup> Jolene Chu, "From Marginalisation to Martyrdom," in *Persecution and Resistance of Jehovah's Witnesses During the Nazi-Regime, 1933-1945*, ed. Hans Hesse (Chicago: Edition Temmen, 2001), 367.

<sup>102</sup> Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 198.

<sup>103</sup> Yonan, "Spiritual Resistance," 322

<sup>104</sup> Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 198.

be cautious not to minimise the bravery of the few other individuals who defied their churches' complacency in order to resist the regime.<sup>105</sup>

When discussing the lack of resistance from the Christian Churches, there are many factors which do not excuse their behaviour, but interpret their justifications and motivations and account for socio-political factors. Firstly, the churches found it difficult to look beyond their own obligations to the state, which prevented them from fully comprehending their responsibility to each other and Christianity.<sup>106</sup> Church leaders were conscious of the Gestapo's oppression which also hindered their ideological ability to resist.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, the churches faced a tension between staying true to scripture (which endorsed obedience and respect to the state), or the moral obligation to oppose Nazism.<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, the main motive for their limited resistance was survival, as Günther van Norden explains, church leaders often confined their resistance to church matters.<sup>109</sup> Once again, this explains the lack of Christian resistance because many church members believed the only way to survive the regime was to collaborate and accommodate it.<sup>110</sup> This behaviour was encouraged by Hitler's ambitious position towards Christianity. Consequently, churches were motivated by their desire to protecting their interests and values.<sup>111</sup> Overall the story of the Christian Churches during the regime is one of betrayal, timidity, unbelief, and unawareness, rather than of faith, courage, or moral responsibility as religious institutions.<sup>112</sup> Resistance was expressed by

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<sup>105</sup> James N. Pellechia, "The Cost of Spiritual Resistance: Jehovah's Witnesses During the Nazi Era," in *Confront!* ed. John J. Michalczyk (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2004), 24.

<sup>106</sup> van Norden, "Opposition by Churches and Christians," 49

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 53; 48.

<sup>110</sup> Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 228.

<sup>111</sup> Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches Under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 345.

<sup>112</sup> Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, xv.

fighting Nazism's interference within the church, but amounted to little more than this.<sup>113</sup>

Guenter Lewy is correct in claiming the cost for the Christian churches to fully resist would have been huge, but it would have changed history.<sup>114</sup>

Neither the Protestant nor the Catholic Churches had the willpower or commitment to overthrow the regime, which was done by individuals and small groups.<sup>115</sup> Investigating Christian resistance reveals that whilst the churches and sects were less engaged in resistance, there were a number of individuals who stepped out from their institutions to oppose Nazism.<sup>116</sup> We must remember however, that despite these few individuals, the majority of Christian individuals were bystanders, collaborators and perpetrators who facilitated or accommodated the regime.<sup>117</sup> Also, those who did resist were not always committed or successful, and many were unable to continue their actions.<sup>118</sup> Bishop von Galen's opposition exemplifies this,<sup>119</sup> as he publicly opposed state forces and encouraged others to do the same,<sup>120</sup> but unfortunately, his resistance was limited because he did not believe in attacking the internal nature of the state, which complicated his motives.<sup>121</sup> Another example of individual resistance comes from the Mormon Christian Sect where a number of individuals resisted despite the consequence of disownment from their churches.<sup>122</sup> For example, Heinrich Worbs was tortured and detained after making rebellious comments,<sup>123</sup> and Helmut Hübener, Rudolf Wobbe and Karl Shrubbe, all listened to contraband radio, distributed

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<sup>113</sup> von Klemperer, *German Resistance Against Hitler*, 38-39.

<sup>114</sup> Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*, 320.

<sup>115</sup> van Norden, "Opposition by Churches and Christians," 57.

<sup>116</sup> Phayer, "Questions about Catholic Resistance," 328.

<sup>117</sup> Pellechia, "The Cost of Spiritual Resistance," 23.

<sup>118</sup> Raymond Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," in *Resistance Against The Third Reich, 1933-1990*, ed. Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 207.

<sup>119</sup> King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions*, 15.

<sup>120</sup> Hoffman, *The History of the German Resistance*, 311.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>122</sup> King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions*, 72-74.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-74.

materials, and disagreed with the regime; they were consequently handed to the police and excommunicated.<sup>124</sup> Beyond this, there are countless individuals who resisted for a limited time before it became impractical or impossible to continue. For example, Heinrich Gruber smuggled children out of Germany using underground railroads, but by 1939 Jewish emigration meant this was too difficult to continue.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, some individuals were able to reach limited resistance goals such as State Bishop Theophil Wurm who protested by writing to Hitler on behalf of Protestants to achieve a restraint on euthanasia.<sup>126</sup> Overall though, for various reasons such as lacking church support, oppression from the regime and limited motivations, many individuals were prevented from committing to resistance.<sup>127</sup> That is, with the exception of two well known individuals: Martin Niemoller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Few other individuals were as successful or recognised for their resistance as Bonhoeffer and Niemoller, but between whom there are still differences in action, motivation, and reception.<sup>128</sup>

Martin Niemoller was a Protestant pastor involved in founding the Emergency Association for Pastors, which later became the Confessing Church.<sup>129</sup> Niemoller has often been disregarded as a resister though, because his behaviour was limited, illustrated as he allowed Nazism to enter his church by displaying swastikas and performing the 'Heil Hitler' salute.<sup>130</sup> He was also unable to spark deeper resistance within the Confessing Church, hence

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 72-74.

<sup>125</sup> Eldridge, "Ideological Incompatibility," 161.

<sup>126</sup> van Norden, "Opposition by Churches and Christians," 52.

<sup>127</sup> Richard J. Evans, "Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42 (2007), 6; Yonan, "Spiritual Resistance," 314.

<sup>128</sup> Susan Ottaway, *Hitler's Traitors: German Resistance to the Nazis* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2003), 83.

<sup>129</sup> Housden, *Resistance and Conformity in the Third Reich*, 47.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 53.

when he was arrested,<sup>131</sup> the church lost its resistance motivations.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, it appeared that Niemoller stood up for Jews but this too was limited as he largely defended Jewish Protestant pastors.<sup>133</sup> Thus the question remains: if not for resistance, then why has Niemoller been remembered? It is because of his theology which, similar to Bonhoeffer's, became a stepping block for understanding post-war theology.<sup>134</sup> Perhaps Niemoller is also remembered because Christian resistance was so insubstantial, and celebration of Niemoller thus results from the historical desire to remember the few who did resist Nazi Germany. Niemoller is as close as we can get to someone who has risen to the status of Bonhoeffer, but his limited resistance and theology means these two men are not entirely comparable.

Bonhoeffer's resistance was unique, yet did not come naturally to him, but instead was developed throughout Nazi Germany. In his early life he wanted to become a theologian and minister, inspired by many hours spent reading his deceased brothers bible.<sup>135</sup> His ambition to become a theologian was further impacted by loneliness and an urge for independence.<sup>136</sup> When Bonhoeffer was twenty-one he completed his first work, *Sanctorum Communio*, which was a theological enquiry into the sociology of the church,<sup>137</sup> and he later developed other Christian theological works.<sup>138</sup> Another impact on Bonhoeffer was his family's shared belief that Nazism was dangerous, because they too saw through Hitler's facade.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, external events such as the Berlin measures against Jews,<sup>140</sup> and

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<sup>131</sup> Niemoller was arrested for assumed attacks against the state. For more, see: Ottoway, *Hitler's Traitors: German Resistance to the Nazis*, 80-86.

<sup>132</sup> Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 219-220.

<sup>133</sup> Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 28.

<sup>134</sup> Jeanrond, "From Resistance to Liberation Theology," 310.

<sup>135</sup> Nelson, "The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 25.

<sup>136</sup> Ebehard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Collins, 1970), 23.

<sup>137</sup> John D. Godsey, *Preface to Bonhoeffer: The Man and Two of His Shorter Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 2.

<sup>138</sup> Godsey, "Preface to Bonhoeffer," 2.

<sup>139</sup> Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, 143.

<sup>140</sup> Raymond Mengus, "Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," *The Journal of Modern History* 64 (1992), 207.

Bonhoeffer's deep empathy for church ministers persecuted for their Jewish origins also deepened Bonhoeffer's resistance motivation.<sup>141</sup> Eventually, due to his empathy, moral injustice and theological foundation, Bonhoeffer believed the best service to his faith and fatherland in obedience to God's will was to oppose those ruining the land.<sup>142</sup> Therefore Bonhoeffer decided to return to Germany from his stay in America:

I must live through this difficult period of our national 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 thrill of this time with my people.<sup>143</sup>

This moment signalled Bonhoeffer's life commitment to resistance. Through his actions Many churches traditionally respected the state as an institution and were reluctant to challenge it,<sup>144</sup> but Bonhoeffer confronted this behaviour by suggesting whilst the church should respect the state, it should also be critical incase this was inadvertent support of a dangerous political party.<sup>145</sup> He believed the church needed to free itself from the threats and encroachment of Nazism;<sup>146</sup> this ultimately inspired him to develop full-hearted resistance, grounded in his ethical theology and Christian faith, rather than innate motivation. Bonhoeffer embodied the Christian command to love everybody.<sup>147</sup>

As an individual, Bonhoeffer's resistance differed from the major churches' and sects' because he acted outside the institution and went on a personal journey of resistance which

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<sup>141</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 208.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>143</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 209.

<sup>144</sup> John D. Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1960), 109.

<sup>145</sup> Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 109.

<sup>146</sup> Heinz Eduard Tödt, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Decisions in the Crisis Years 1929-33," *Studies In Christian Ethics* 18 (2005), 119-120.

<sup>147</sup> von Klemperer, *German Resistance Against Hitler*, 42.

escalated from illegal preaching through to conspiracy. Bethge has explained that Bonhoeffer's actions adhered to a continually intensifying cycle, finding himself in an uncompromising situation, a new success, then a further disappointment.<sup>148</sup> His resistance began when he was banned from public speaking in 1940,<sup>149</sup> and soon, to help him avoid being drafted, Bonhoeffer's brother found him a role in the *Abwehr* resistance group, who met to discuss post-Nazi Germany where Christianity would be the base of society.<sup>150</sup> In the *Abwehr*, Bonhoeffer was able to utilise his church contacts to communicate with allies and soon became a double agent spreading information about the groups resistance.<sup>151</sup> However, we should not forget that Bonhoeffer sometimes worked alongside others in his resistance, often being accompanied by those around him, especially *Abwehr* members,<sup>152</sup> but he also had interactions with members from the *Kreisau* Circle.<sup>153</sup> Ultimately, Bonhoeffer's resistance escalated until he became involved with the *Valkyrie* plot to kill Hitler.<sup>154</sup> His involvement in this conspiracy significantly shaped, and was shaped by, his ethics; therefore, he became the man of extreme responsibility unlike any other Christian in Nazi Germany.<sup>155</sup>

Institutional and individual Christian resistance in Nazi Germany had different motivations because institutional resistance was limitedly focused on survival, whilst individual resistance was deliberate and morally motivated. Nonetheless, we should not lose sight of the wider historical context, because the twelve year regime was complex and

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<sup>148</sup> Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 628.

<sup>149</sup> Alex Rankin "Bonhoeffer, A Modern Martyr: Taking a Stand Against the State Gone Mad," *The History Teacher* 40 (2006), 114.

<sup>150</sup> Hoffman, *The History of the German Resistance*, 192.

<sup>151</sup> Rankin, "Bonhoeffer, A Modern Martyr," 114.

<sup>152</sup> Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: Post-Holocaust Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 132.

<sup>153</sup> For more about Bonhoeffer's interactions with the *Kreisau* Circle see: Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 654-667.

<sup>154</sup> Rankin, "Bonhoeffer, A Modern Martyr," 114.

<sup>155</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 209.



included many other individuals resisters who have not been remembered.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore the glorification of individuals such as Bonhoeffer and Niemoller has often meant that the *Kirchenkampf* is neglected,<sup>157</sup> because then individuals are wrongly used to represent Christianity's response to Nazism, it dishonours the Christians who did resist, and ignores the complexity of Christian resistance. Bonhoeffer's behaviour is thus significant because he moved beyond his church to resist Nazism with his life, without limitations, despite having no church support. For this reason, we should consider Bonhoeffer representative of episodic rather than Christian institutional resistance,<sup>158</sup> and understand that he stands apart from the history of Christian resistance and *Kirchenkampf* because of his achievements.

## Chapter Two

### Bonhoeffer's Theological Ethics

Understanding Bonhoeffer's ethical theology is instrumental to grasping and contextualising his resistance in Nazi Germany, and to deciphering why he has been celebrated. Understanding his ethical theology in light of his resistance means the reciprocal relationship between the two becomes evident, as his resistance was formed by his thoughts, but his resistance challenged, as well as solidified, his beliefs. Thus, when looking at Bonhoeffer's ethical thought, one cannot and should not attempt to separate it from his theology because the ethical intensification of Bonhoeffer's theology meant the two were

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<sup>156</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," 201.

<sup>157</sup> Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 26.

<sup>158</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," 202.

inseparable.<sup>159</sup> The ethical concerns and questions in Bonhoeffer's theology render it 'ethical theology' which is primarily grounded in the notion that Christ is at the centre of everything, and expresses itself in responsibility and relationality.<sup>160</sup> It is therefore impossible to discuss Bonhoeffer's ethical theology without acknowledging his Christ-centred belief, and it is imperative to explain what he understood about the relationship between God and Christ, because he often mentions both. Bonhoeffer explains:

In Jesus Christ the reality of God entered into the reality of this world. The place where the answer is given, both to the question concerning the reality of God and to the question concerning the reality of the world, is designated solely and alone by the name Jesus Christ. God and the worlds are comprised in this name. In Him all things consist.<sup>161</sup>

Thus when Bonhoeffer mentions Christ, he is referring to Jesus, but also to God whom Christ embodies. Moreover, Bonhoeffer believed ethical theology required adherence to the likeness of Christ, which is achieved through relationship with God.<sup>162</sup> The task of understanding Bonhoeffer's ethical theology thus means accepting the individual's responsibility to understand and embrace God and the world.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, he believed that ethics arise when there is a disruption in normal life processes, and values are called into question.<sup>164</sup> It is understandable therefore, that Bonhoeffer developed his ethical theology in the context of Nazi Germany as normal life on every level was altered.

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<sup>159</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 26; Benjamin A. Reist, *The Promise of Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1968), 118-119.

<sup>160</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 19.

<sup>161</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (London: SCM Press, 1955), 61.

<sup>162</sup> Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 205.

<sup>163</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 109.

<sup>164</sup> Larry Rasmussen, *Studies in Christian Ethics: Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Reality and Resistance* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 30.

Bonhoeffer's ethical theology was not about being or doing good, but about God's will;<sup>165</sup> thus everything should be founded in God's command, which results in Bonhoeffer's radical centrality of Christ.<sup>166</sup> This is most likely influenced by Martin Luther whom Bonhoeffer admired, and who also believed that ethics should be grounded in the word of God, not in human subjectivity.<sup>167</sup> Bonhoeffer thus rejects the idea that conscience is enough to determine the will of God because conscience is a result of inner division from the fall of creation.<sup>168</sup> This means the basis of Bonhoeffer's ethical theology is not principles of right and wrong, but is a relationship with God,<sup>169</sup> and a willingness to go on the mission asked of you:<sup>170</sup>

Instead of asking how one can be good and do good, one must ask what is the will of God. But the will of God is nothing other than the becoming real of the reality of Christ with us and in our world. The will of God, therefore, is not an idea, still demanding to become real; it is itself a reality already in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>171</sup>

Bonhoeffer explains in *Ethics* that the commandment of God to embrace all of life is not a principle, not absolutist,<sup>172</sup> and not detachable from time or place;<sup>173</sup> he believed we should live in response to the challenges of encountering Christ in an ever-changing world.<sup>174</sup>

Bonhoeffer writes: "Action which is in accordance with Christ is action which is in

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<sup>165</sup> Burtneß, *Shaping The Future*, 15.

<sup>166</sup> Burtneß, *Shaping The Future*, 30; 31.

<sup>167</sup> James W. Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer's Theology: Classical and Revolutionary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 76.

<sup>168</sup> Burtneß, *Shaping the Future*, 93.

<sup>169</sup> John W. de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer." In *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 367.

<sup>170</sup> René Marlé, *Bonhoeffer: The Man and His Work* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 28.

<sup>171</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 77.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>174</sup> Eberhard Bethge, "Bonhoeffer's Christology and His 'Religionless Christianity'," in *Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age*, ed. Peter Vorkink II (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 62.

accordance with reality.”<sup>175</sup> His ethical theology was therefore characterised by concern for the tensions arising from Christian revelation within the reality of the world.<sup>176</sup>

Ultimately, Bonhoeffer believed the right thing to do is what God asks. But if there is no right or wrong per se, how did Bonhoeffer conclude that in relation to the will of God, the Nazi state would be deemed evil, and that the appropriate response was resistance? Through his knowledge and relationship with God, Bonhoeffer identified that the state operated against the will of God through its misuse of power which cut it from God’s purpose.<sup>177</sup> He believed Nazism represented temptation and was founded on mediocrity and contempt.<sup>178</sup> The Lutheran Church was initially an obstacle for Bonhoeffer and others to realise this because of its desire to remain faithful to the state,<sup>179</sup> yet Bonhoeffer overcame this because he regarded the Nazi state as evil, which in addition to his belief in God resulted in his responsibility to resist; this was a difficult decision many other Christians were unable to make.<sup>180</sup> Bonhoeffer’s resistance decisions therefore came not from moral principles or rules, but from the will of God.

Whilst the different topics of Bonhoeffer’s ethical theology are intrinsically interconnected, for the purpose of deciphering his ethical theology in relation to Christian resistance in Nazi Germany, it is helpful to identify and discuss its themes of responsibility, deputyship, rejection of spheres and structures, and the contradictions between Christian law and state law. Firstly, responsibility in Bonhoeffer’s ethical theology means an obedience to

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<sup>175</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 199.

<sup>176</sup> Phillips, *Christ For Us*, 133.

<sup>177</sup> Burtness, *Shaping the Future*, 84-85.

<sup>178</sup> Marlé, *Bonhoeffer*, 14.

<sup>179</sup> Franklin Sherman, “Death of A Modern Martyr: The Witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” *The Expository Times* 76 (1965), 206.

<sup>180</sup> Sherman, “Death of a Modern Martyr,” 206.

God's call to serve in the world's reality.<sup>181</sup> Bonhoeffer asserted that ethics only make sense when connected to a time and a place:<sup>182</sup> "to confine the ethical phenomena to its proper place and time is not to invalidate it; it is, on the contrary, to render it fully operative."<sup>183</sup> Therefore, to escape time and place is to escape responsibility for the now and the future;<sup>184</sup> responsibility is connected to concrete contexts rather than being an ethical absolute.<sup>185</sup> For this reason, we find Bonhoeffer's ethical theology directly related to and informed by Nazi Germany, because he believed Christ brought perspective through revealing his present and pluralistic contextual responsibilities.<sup>186</sup> An example of Bonhoeffer's realisation of responsibility was his awareness that his social class was responsible for opposing Nazism.<sup>187</sup> He also believed responsibility meant action with our whole lives, which explains the sacrifice of his life to resist Nazism.<sup>188</sup> Free responsible action, and acting on behalf of Christ thus means reengaging with the particularities of a situation, and requires freedom, love for ones neighbour and a willingness to take on guilt.<sup>189</sup> Hence to be free of guilt and death, one needs to embrace responsibility: "only the selfless man lives responsibly, and this means only the selfless man lives."<sup>190</sup> This belief is evidently practiced through Bonhoeffer's selfless decision to return to Germany, when he could have emigrated to protect himself. Bonhoeffer conceptualised that this embodiment of Christ-centred and selfless responsibility is acted through deputyship and its mandates.

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<sup>181</sup> Rasmussen, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 37.

<sup>182</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 122.

<sup>183</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 233.

<sup>184</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 125.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>186</sup> Bethge, "Bonhoeffer's Christology," 71.

<sup>187</sup> Bethge, "Turning Points in Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought," 89.

<sup>188</sup> Wolfgang Huber, "Answering For The Past, Shaping the Future: In Memory Of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *The Ecumenical Review* 47 (1995), 255.

<sup>189</sup> Clifford J. Green, "Pacifism and Tyrannicide: Bonhoeffer's Christian Peace Ethic," *Studies In Christian Ethics* 18 (2005), 43.

<sup>190</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 196.

“No man can altogether escape responsibility, and this means that no man can avoid deputyship.”<sup>191</sup> For Bonhoeffer, deputyship was the exercise of responsibility,<sup>192</sup> as we do for Christ what he cannot do, so his work is done through us.<sup>193</sup> Bonhoeffer understood that deputyship required laying down ones life in obedience to God.<sup>194</sup> In Nazi Germany resistance was the first step of deputyship, following the belief that Nazism was evil, and that the will of God was to oppose it. Deputyship also included mandates of responsibility, obligation, a relationship under the commission of Christ,<sup>195</sup> supporting ones neighbour in active love, intercession, and forgiving sins.<sup>196</sup> However, the call of deputyship and its mandates of practical obedience to God’s will required a lifestyle Bonhoeffer knew many Christians would not prepared to engage in.<sup>197</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s understanding of ethics, and the will of God, also rejects two-sphere structures which separate God and the world and only embrace one.<sup>198</sup> He argues: “there are not two realities, but one reality, and that is the reality of God, which has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world. Sharing in Christ we stand at once in both the reality of God and the reality of the world.”<sup>199</sup> This is the belief that Christ’s reality finds the world and God affirmed at the same time, and the Christian, the world and God are never separable.<sup>200</sup> The separation of these two realms, according to Bonhoeffer, would deny the church and claim

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>192</sup> Rasmussen, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 38.

<sup>193</sup> Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Martin Rumscheidt (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 81.

<sup>194</sup> Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 81.

<sup>195</sup> Rasmussen, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 41.

<sup>196</sup> Jürgen Weissbach, “Christology and Ethics,” in *Two Studies in the Theology of Bonhoeffer: by Jürgen Moltmann and Jürgen Weissbach*, trans. Reginal H Fuller and Ilse Fuller (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967), 105.

<sup>197</sup> Marlé, *Bonhoeffer*, 22.

<sup>198</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 39.

<sup>199</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 64.

<sup>200</sup> Urlik Becker Nissen, “Letting Reality Become Real: On Mystery and Reality in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*,” *Journal of Religion Ethics* 39 (2011), 325.

that it has lost its prophetic and spiritual reality.<sup>201</sup> Bonhoeffer affirms this by saying: “Only he...who loves the earth and God in one, can believe in the kingdom of God.”<sup>202</sup> Essentially, separability of the world and God denies the kingdom of God, and allows man to abandon responsibility and reality as a whole, because he would only be present in one.<sup>203</sup> Thus, one cannot reduce the church to being either of the world or God, because it must remain in both.<sup>204</sup> In saying this, there is an admittance that God is not the world, and the world is not God, but is an acceptance that they are intrinsically linked.<sup>205</sup> “God and the world are thus at one in Christ in a way which means that although the Church and the world are different from each other, there cannot be a static spatial borderline between them.”<sup>206</sup> Embracing God and the world means ethical action should be informed by God in correspondence to reality, which results in responsibility.<sup>207</sup> In his socio-political context this meant Bonhoeffer considered the church and Nazism to be intrinsically linked, believing that God loved both, and was not distant from either.<sup>208</sup> He was less concerned with the theological place of God in religion because he believed God was bigger than the church, which explains his ability to act beyond his church. He was more interested in the place of God in the world, which was inclusive of the church.<sup>209</sup>

Due to the centrality of Christ, Bonhoeffer also rejected the secular understanding that ethics were a structure, set of principles, or rules because he believed that ethics are derived

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<sup>201</sup> Nissen, “Letting Reality Become Real,” 333.

<sup>202</sup> Phillips, *Christ For Us*, 114.

<sup>203</sup> Reist, *The Promise of Bonhoeffer*, 81.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>205</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 40.

<sup>206</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 72.

<sup>207</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 50.

<sup>208</sup> Sherman, “Death of a Modern Martyr,” 205; Burtness, *Shaping the Future*, 109.

<sup>209</sup> de Gruchy, “Bonhoeffer,” 362.

from the will of God.<sup>210</sup> Thinking of ethics as a phenomenon, according to Bonhoeffer, will: “injure and destroy the creaturely wholeness of life.”<sup>211</sup> He rejects prescriptive understandings of ethics because they deny freedom in Christ, and separate ethics from Christ;<sup>212</sup> “ethical thinking in terms of spheres, then, is invalidated by faith in the revelation of the ultimate reality in Jesus Christ.”<sup>213</sup> Because of his rejection of structures and principles, it would be wrong to then characterise Bonhoeffer by principles of non-violence,<sup>214</sup> as many have done by labelling him a pacifist.<sup>215</sup> The only appropriate prescription to define Bonhoeffer is radically Christ-centric, because he admitted to this, believing it was reality rather than a principle. Therefore, Bonhoeffer’s ethics endorsed obedience to the will of God, and the rejection of structures, rules and principles.<sup>216</sup>

The question commonly asked about Bonhoeffer’s ethical stance, is how he was able to justify his involvement in the attempted assassination of Hitler, yet remain a Christian and promote a commitment to law and order?<sup>217</sup> “everyone is subject to an obligation of obedience towards government.”<sup>218</sup> As with everything in Bonhoeffer’s ethical theology, his decision was grounded in Christ. Firstly, Bonhoeffer made himself responsible to the gospels rather than the law, because he knew the law was susceptible to corruption.<sup>219</sup> He also believed that Christians were obligated to help those who suffered, including at the hands of the state; once he understood this, he sacrificed his life to resisting Nazism.<sup>220</sup> Bonhoeffer

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<sup>210</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 63.

<sup>211</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 233.

<sup>212</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 64.

<sup>213</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 66.

<sup>214</sup> Green, “Pacifism and Tyrannicide,” 33.

<sup>215</sup> Charlie Cahill, “The Pragmatic Roots of Bonhoeffer’s Ethics: A Reappraisal of Bonhoeffer’s Time at Union Theological Seminary, 1930-1931,” *German Studies Review* 36 (2013), 23-24.

<sup>216</sup> Green, “Pacifism and Tyrannicide,” 44.

<sup>217</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 78.

<sup>218</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 308.

<sup>219</sup> von Klemperer, *German Resistance Against Hitler*, 41

<sup>220</sup> Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 35.



used a metaphor of a madman driving through a crowd to explain his theological and ethical justification for attempting to kill Hitler.<sup>221</sup> As a pastor, he believed it was not only his responsibility to console the wounded, but also to stop the madman.<sup>222</sup> He was willing to assist the defeat of his country, because he believed it was the only way to end Nazism and its oppression.<sup>223</sup> Following this, Bonhoeffer believed that the *Valkyrie* plot was not murder, but tyrannicide;<sup>224</sup> this was an exception to Christian non-violence as a last resort.<sup>225</sup> Clearly this justification has been accepted by others because, despite the initial rejection of Bonhoeffer following the war, it was because he risked his life through conspiracy, and his martyrdom which have been celebrated worldwide. Essentially, Bonhoeffer believed that law is a strong force, but not the final one.<sup>226</sup> Burtness explains that Bonhoeffer recast law to place it back in the centrality of God, not to make it absolute, nor to abandon it, but to affirm its connection to Christ.<sup>227</sup> The basis of Bonhoeffer's difficult decision to help end Hitler's life came not from adhering to laws or principles, but from responsible action and obedience, relative to context, which Bonhoeffer believed was the will of God.

Examination of Bonhoeffer's thoughts therefore reveals there is no separation between his ethics and theology, because Christ is at the centre of both which equates to responsibility and relationality through deputyship.<sup>228</sup> He believes that the ultimate reality is God's will, not oneself or the world,<sup>229</sup> therefore he did more than hate the state or accommodate the regime, because his deep ethical theology motivated him to resist the

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<sup>221</sup> Marlé, *Bonhoeffer*, 33.

<sup>222</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 137.

<sup>223</sup> Rankin, "Bonhoeffer, A Modern Martyr," 115.

<sup>224</sup> Green, "Pacifism and Tyrannicide," 41.

<sup>225</sup> Rasmussen, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 50.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>227</sup> Burtness, *Shaping The Future*, 102.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>229</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 55.

regime, and through this resistance he exercised his ethical theology and projected free responsibility in Christ. Therefore, every aspect of his resistance, including his decision to be involved in killing Hitler, was grounded in ethical theology and was religiously motivated.<sup>230</sup> Bonhoeffer had a vision, intellectual means, moral courage, and theological ability to live and express his vision.<sup>231</sup> Consequently, as Raymond Mengus concludes, he was unique because of the combination of, and relationship between his ethical and theological disposition;<sup>232</sup> this meant he attempted to end Nazism's oppression despite being one of the few Christians to do so.

### Chapter Three

## Reception and Celebration of Bonhoeffer

Godsey was one of the first writers interested in Bonhoeffer, and he had already detected Bonhoeffer's importance by 1957: "the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is becoming known in ever-widening circles."<sup>233</sup> However, despite Bonhoeffer's fame today, this was not always the case. In collective memory Bonhoeffer has been ignored and hailed.<sup>234</sup> Initially after the war ended Bonhoeffer had no role in collective memory; even his own church refused to acknowledge him because they refused to support the conspiracy to kill Hitler.<sup>235</sup> "It was common for churchmen to deny him a role as a Christian martyr because the context of the events leading to his death was political."<sup>236</sup> Eventually though, people stopped

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<sup>230</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 134.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>232</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 206.

<sup>233</sup> Godesy, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 13.

<sup>234</sup> Paul L. Lehmann, "Faith and Worldliness in Bonhoeffer's Thought," in *Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age*, ed. Peter Vorkink (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 25.

<sup>235</sup> Bethge, "Turning Points in Bonhoeffer Life and Thought," 75.

<sup>236</sup> John C. Bennett, foreword to *Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age*, edited by Peter Vorkink II (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), vii.

viewing him as a traitor, yet still had reservations about his ethical theology<sup>237</sup> Some West Germany churches still believed Bonhoeffer was a menace to Christianity.<sup>238</sup> However, two reasons which saw a shift from this negative attitude and ensured he received attention included distance from the war, and Bethge's efforts to ensure Bonhoeffer was recognised.<sup>239</sup> This attention towards Bonhoeffer was not simple acceptance though, because for a period of time the desire for absolution after the Holocaust meant Bonhoeffer was commoditised and circulated as a martyr and a symbol of Christian resistance, which would be against Bonhoeffer's will because it cheapened what he stood for.<sup>240</sup> Despite this, Bonhoeffer's significance in collective memory eventually flourished and his life, theology and resistance became widely known, and often has been used to encourage discussions of the church.<sup>241</sup> Whilst it is important to understand how Bonhoeffer has been received over time and his role in collective memory, we must also discuss who has received him,<sup>242</sup> because we have a responsibility to take into account perspectives from other academics so as to arrive at a comprehensive picture of Bonhoeffer.<sup>243</sup> Considering his resistance alone is not enough to understand his overall accomplishment and heroism, we must also take into account his ethical theology because his resistance was directly related to it. This means that Bonhoeffer has interested not only academics, but also the general public, Christian and secular alike.

Eberhard Bethge is responsible for the widespread reception of Bonhoeffer's works and publications; however, many have wondered Bonhoeffer's legacy is imbued with

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<sup>237</sup> de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer," 357.

<sup>238</sup> Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 11.

<sup>239</sup> de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer", 357.

<sup>240</sup> Robert O. Smith, "Reclaiming Bonhoeffer After Auschwitz," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43 (2004) 215.

<sup>241</sup> Hauerwas, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 137.

<sup>242</sup> Phillips, *Christ For Us*, 26.

<sup>243</sup> de Gruchy, "The Reception of Bonhoeffer's Theology," 96.

Bethge's accidental input?<sup>244</sup> The answer to this is difficult and inconclusive. Whilst one could argue that publications of Bonhoeffer's works, especially *Ethics*, are not truly Bonhoeffer due to translations and interpretations, one can also argue that Bethge was aware of these potential issues,<sup>245</sup> and thus ensured Bonhoeffer's voice and intent remained intact. Furthermore, Bethge had a contemporary role as a participant-witness, so he saw and learnt what Bonhoeffer did whilst he was doing it, which has assisted Bethge's accuracy in depicting Bonhoeffer.<sup>246</sup> Bethge dedicated himself to ensuring Bonhoeffer was not misunderstood or misinterpreted,<sup>247</sup> by asserting that Bonhoeffer was the guidepost to all studies about his life or thought.<sup>248</sup> Therefore, in addition to his stature as a theologian and life as a witness, Bethge's tireless work has ensured Bonhoeffer is remembered and endorsed accurately.<sup>249</sup> The reason Bonhoeffer is widely known is therefore because of Bethge, but the reason Bonhoeffer appeals to us today is because of his life and work; Bonhoeffer suffered as a witness to Christ and speaks to many people regardless of who enabled it to be known. Even though Bethge completed the publication of some of Bonhoeffer's works such as *Ethics*, this is not the creation of a legacy, simply the interpretation and circulation of it.<sup>250</sup>

The impact of Bonhoeffer on Christians, theoreticians, historians, and the public is due to the importance of his life, thoughts and death. His popularity is credited to the significance of his death, complex ideas, contributions of theology, radicalism, and abandonment of tradition.<sup>251</sup> Many scholars have also written extensive biographies that

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<sup>244</sup> Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy*, 3.

<sup>245</sup> Throughout Bethge's book *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Bethge consistently admits where information may be skewed, is incomplete, or is unknown.

<sup>246</sup> de Gruchy, "Eberhard Bethge," 352.

<sup>247</sup> Hopper, *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer*, 19.

<sup>248</sup> Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy*, 5.

<sup>249</sup> de Gruchy, "Eberhard Bethge," 365.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>251</sup> Lehman, "Faith and Worldliness in Bonhoeffer's Thought," 26-27.

recognise the significance of Bonhoeffer. These biographies are still being written because, as Timothy J. Keller claims in Metaxas' 2010 book: *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, the English world needs to know more about Bonhoeffer's thoughts and life.<sup>252</sup> Furthermore, Marsh's 2014 biography *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* further exemplifies that the world is still amazed by Bonhoeffer. Godsey affirms that there are several reasons Bonhoeffer has continuously attracted respect and attention: because he understood our world,<sup>253</sup> expressed a universal understanding of Christ,<sup>254</sup> recalls us to discipleship,<sup>255</sup> and exemplified his beliefs throughout his life.<sup>256</sup> de Gruchy agrees with Godsey, reinforcing that Bonhoeffer continuously attracts people through the challenges he poses, and because he embodies a legacy as a pastor, theologian and martyr.<sup>257</sup> Both Godsey and de Gruchy have produced multiple publications on Bonhoeffer, and have been able to grasp, share and justify reasons for Bonhoeffer's celebration.

Some of this celebration of Bonhoeffer's life and works has come from Christians,<sup>258</sup> because he lived his Christian faith in responsibility: "Why does Dietrich Bonhoeffer attract us? Because he was a human being, a Christian of his time and place, who speaks poignantly to us today."<sup>259</sup> Books which have demonstrated this embrace of Bonhoeffer by Christians includes Larry L. Rasmussen's book *Studies in Christian Ethics: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, which delves into discussions of what Bonhoeffer's ethical theology means for Christians today. Rasmussen correctly claims that "the life and death of Dietrich

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<sup>252</sup> Timothy J. Keller, Foreword to *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, written by Eric Metaxas (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), xv.

<sup>253</sup> Godsey, "Preface to Bonhoeffer," 7-8.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>257</sup> John W. de Gruchy, foreword to *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.), xviii.

<sup>258</sup> Rankin, "Bonhoeffer: A Modern Martyr," 115.

<sup>259</sup> Michael L. Morison, "Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Pacifist, Nazi Resister," *Pastoral Psychology* 56 (2008), 551.

Bonhoeffer generate the deepest respect because in them he enacted his own Christology with extraordinary power.”<sup>260</sup> This book thoroughly analyses Bonhoeffer’s ethical theology, yet arguably takes this a little too far; despite being about resistance, it fails to contextualise Bonhoeffer appropriately within the *Kirchenkampf*, which can risk miscommunication that his resistance was easy, or he is the only example of Christian resistance, which is not the case. Nonetheless, Rasmussen’s book represents the Christian desire to find methods for theorising and practicing Christianity in the world with integrity like Bonhoeffer did. Another text which demonstrates Christian reception of Bonhoeffer is Stephen J Nichols book *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life: From Cross, For the World*; Nichols proclaims that because Christians are still grasping the meaning of their faith to God and the world, Bonhoeffer is celebrated because he exemplifies this, meaning he is still valuable today.<sup>261</sup>

Furthermore, Bonhoeffer’s own writings *Life Together*, *The Cost of Discipleship*, and *Ethics* have been utilised by Christians worldwide to teach about Christianity and ethics because Bonhoeffer speaks as a disciple of Christ, and a man of action in a dangerous world, who struggled with the meaning of Christianity.<sup>262</sup> Being a devout Christian and theologian during Nazi Germany, the true nature of human ethics was brought to light, tested, and illuminated a moral grey area to Bonhoeffer.<sup>263</sup> His life has encouraged the reconsideration of ethics following the challenge he poses through his contextual resistance, and he is recognised as a sign of moral resistance.<sup>264</sup> His empathy for Christian believers, and his struggle of having an active faith in a secular world have been universally inspirational and

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<sup>260</sup> Rasmussen, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 149.

<sup>261</sup> Stephen J. Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life: From Cross, For the World* (Crossway: Wheaton, 2013), 27.

<sup>262</sup> Morison, “Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Pacifist, Nazi Resister,” 116.

<sup>263</sup> Stephen Plant, *Bonhoeffer: Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (London/New York: Continuum, 2004), 141.

<sup>264</sup> Smith, “Reclaiming Bonhoeffer,” 205.

instructional.<sup>265</sup> Bonhoeffer has accordingly been embraced by Christians worldwide because of his theology, courage and commitment to resistance, but also because he practically lived out his belief that Christians could not stand by while evil surrounded them; this choice of integrity now stands as an example to Christians and humanity.<sup>266</sup> Therefore, Bonhoeffer continues to inspire and challenge denominations, throughout the world about what it means to be Christian and live out the faith.<sup>267</sup>

Bonhoeffer has also been celebrated by theologians worldwide because he was a moralist, theoretician of extreme responsibility,<sup>268</sup> and a biblical theologian;<sup>269</sup> de Gruchy argues that because Bonhoeffer's ethics and resistance were grounded upon a deep interest in theology and philosophy, him and his thoughts are a complex and interesting study for theologians worldwide.<sup>270</sup> This is evident as Bonhoeffer studies underwent severe debate in the 1950s, secularisation in the 1960s, and philosophical discussion in the 1970s; thus have constantly been of interest.<sup>271</sup> Furthermore, Marvin Bergman believes that Bonhoeffer is praised theologically because he instructs about morals and decision making.<sup>272</sup> He teaches us about the need for a core set of beliefs and the importance of embracing uncertainty.<sup>273</sup> Bonhoeffer also provides a large and significant compilation of thoughts to navigate and analyse which directly inspires and challenges us through his ethical theology. For example,

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<sup>265</sup> Martin E. Marty, Introduction: Problems and Possibilities in Bonhoeffer's Thought to *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, ed. Martin E. Marty (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963), 14.

<sup>266</sup> Rankin, "Bonhoeffer: A Modern Martyr," 116.

<sup>267</sup> de Gruchy, "The Reception of Bonhoeffer's Theology," 93.

<sup>268</sup> Mengus, "Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," 142.

<sup>269</sup> Sean Winter, "Word and World: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Biblical Interpretation Today," *Pacifica* 25 (2012), 168.

<sup>270</sup> de Gruchy, "The Reception of Bonhoeffer's Theology," 93.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>272</sup> Marvin Bergman, "Teaching Ethics and Moral Decision-Making in the Light of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *A Bonhoeffer Legacy*, ed. A. J. Klassen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 368.

<sup>273</sup> Robert L. Hunter, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Vision and a Voice for Our Times," *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 1, 1997, accessed 14 July, 2014, 51.

James W. Woelfel's argues in his book *Bonhoeffer's Theology*, that Bonhoeffer's theology still benefit us today, because Woelfel himself has "never fail[ed] to read it again as something fresh, to discover something new in it which I had not seen before, and to be profoundly moved by the poignancy of this warmly human and vigorously Christian man."<sup>274</sup> Woelfel's book discusses Bonhoeffer's theology by analysing liberal culture and secularity, the impact of Luther, Karl Barth and theology, revelation and religion, the humanity of God in Christ, the reality of the church, Christological ethics, and biblical heretics, to illustrate the depth and significance of Bonhoeffer's thoughts.

Another example of theological fascination with Bonhoeffer is A. J. Klassen and his compilation of essays *A Bonhoeffer Legacy* (published on the seventieth anniversary of Bonhoeffer's birth). As Klassen argues, Bonhoeffer offers insight about his own historical context and that of present day.<sup>275</sup> Similarly to Woelfel, Klassen identifies and expands on key themes from Bonhoeffer's theology including theological method, history, Christology and discipleship, the church and the world, religion and secularisation and finally, ethics.<sup>276</sup> Klassen offers a more wide-ranging and encompassing book however, because the incorporation of other historians means it makes it objective because it offers multiple perspectives on Bonhoeffer's legacy. Furthermore, William Kuhns' *In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, which gives a chronological account of Bonhoeffer's theology which is an different approach to studying Bonhoeffer than Woelfel and Klassen's, yet is still effective. These, and many more texts, which encompass a variety of approaches to studying Bonhoeffer's theology, substantiate the celebration of Bonhoeffer's theology because he

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<sup>274</sup> James W. Woelfel, preface to *Bonhoeffer's Theology: Classical and Revolutionary*, ed. James W. Woelfel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 11.

<sup>275</sup> A. J. Klassen, preface to *A Bonhoeffer Legacy: Essays in Understanding*, ed. by A. J. Klassen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), vii.

<sup>276</sup> A. J. Klassen, "Contents," In *A Bonhoeffer Legacy: Essays in Understanding*, ed. A. J. Klassen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), v-vi.



encourages individuals to seek values of vision, compassion, courage, faith and freedom.<sup>277</sup>

Ethical theology alone does not account for Bonhoeffer's significance, but has attracted theologians to study his writings and beliefs which were expressed through his resistance.

There is also a non-scholarly and non-religious way Bonhoeffer has impacted others with his life, death and writings, through themes that explain his life and theology including discipleship and community, justice and peace struggles, and faith in a secular age.<sup>278</sup> Secular writers have been inspired by Bonhoeffer's works such as *The Cost Of Discipleship* because they express universal themes of heroism, resistance, uncompromising ethical commitment, the Christian religion, and the logic of Bonhoeffer's decisions, which were founded in ethical responsibility. The explanation of his involvement in the assassination plot despite his Christian faith, has been of particular interest, including to non-religious individuals. Therefore, his influence extends over theological, denominational and age distinctions,<sup>279</sup> and Martin Marty reinforces that Bonhoeffer's expression has made him attractive across confessional, traditional and national lines.<sup>280</sup> Bonhoeffer was a remarkable man whose legacy thrives due to his active faith, obedient life and inspirational thoughts, which made him a complex and inspirational model of resistance, ethical deliberation and theology.

Bonhoeffer is celebrated today because of his relevance to the world's reality which values political, ethical and anthropological models.<sup>281</sup> His personal decisions throughout Nazi Germany were grounded ethically and religiously, and are still academically and

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<sup>277</sup> Hunter, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 92.

<sup>278</sup> de Gruchy, "The Reception of Bonhoeffer's Theology," 103.

<sup>279</sup> Godsey, "Preface to Bonhoeffer," 7.

<sup>280</sup> Marty, "Introduction," 14.

<sup>281</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," 202.

morally stimulating.<sup>282</sup> His accessibility allows individuals to identify with struggles of determining morals and ethics, and helps highlight present day ethical complexities and challenges.<sup>283</sup> Through his writings, Bonhoeffer encourages individuals in to wrestle with issues of evil, Christianity, ethics, morals and theology, to search for responsibility and an ethical life.<sup>284</sup> Bonhoeffer is furthermore a model for wider human rights through his inspirational insights, morals and ethics.<sup>285</sup> Nonetheless, any theologian or thinker of the past serves us best when we remove ourselves from present day biases and judgements.<sup>286</sup> Then the ones who are outstanding impress us with their insights as we read our own dilemmas.<sup>287</sup> This is true of Bonhoeffer, once we recognise him for who he was and what he did. Therefore, as this chapter does, the interpretation and acknowledgement of Bonhoeffer's reception help give a more accurate assessment of his legacy because we become more attuned to instances where he has been represented inaccurately or out of context.

An example of misrepresentation is Conway's claim that Bonhoeffer represents the *Kirchenkampf*: "it might indeed be claimed that Bonhoeffer's life and martyrdom depict a particularly living and painful example of the whole tragic history of the Church Struggle in Germany."<sup>288</sup> Understanding the Christian Churches' and sects' numerous motivations and achievements, as is discussed in chapter one, we can detect Conway's exaggeration of Bonhoeffer's place in history, because he cannot be used to wholly represent the *Kirchenkampf*. The *Kirchenkampf* included multiple denominations with different beliefs, motivations and behaviour. Because Bonhoeffer was one man from one denomination he

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<sup>282</sup> Mengus, "Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," 134.

<sup>283</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," 134.

<sup>284</sup> Hunter, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 50.

<sup>285</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist", 202; Hopper, *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer*, 24.

<sup>286</sup> Plant, *Bonhoeffer*, 139.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>288</sup> Conway, "The Historiography of the German Church Struggle," 230.

cannot represent all of these un-unified churches and individuals. Bonhoeffer was a Protestant pastor, who sacrificed his life to the regime, and therefore is incapable of simultaneously representing all denominations, individuals major churches, sects, resisters and compliers. Bonhoeffer can only represent his unique journey during Nazi Germany. Likewise, to claim that the *Kirchenkampf* accurately represents Bonhoeffer is an injustice to the significance of his ethical theology and its relationship to his resistance. To use a phenomenon such as the *Kirchenkampf* to represent Bonhoeffer dilutes his radical resistance and ethical theology achievements.

A further misuse of Bonhoeffer's legacy is found in Peter Hoffman's *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945*, where Hoffman claims Niemoller and Bonhoeffer to be the leading responsible figures who represent the Christian response to Nazism and the engagement of Christians in the *Kirchenkampf*.<sup>289</sup> Again, this is a misuse of Bonhoeffer's legacy because, as is discussed in chapter one, Niemoller was not as committed to resistance as Bonhoeffer was, and to liken these two or collectively claim they represent Christianity's response to Nazism is to do an injustice to the depth and strength of Bonhoeffer's resistance and ethical theology. By placing these men together, Bonhoeffer's achievements are assumed to be shared by Niemoller, which is unfair to Bonhoeffer's legacy. Therefore, the ability to comprehend Bonhoeffer's achievements and recognise how they have been represented since his death, gives a more accurate assessment of his achievements, and refines our ability to detect misuse and misrepresentations of him.

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<sup>289</sup> Hoffman, *The History of the German Resistance*, 13.

The question remains, is it Bonhoeffer's writings or his life and death which universally fascinate people?<sup>290</sup> The answer to this is simple: both. Resistance to oppression is still relevant today, and Bonhoeffer continues to teach us how to have courage, be firm in responsibility and stand against oppression.<sup>291</sup> He is celebrated and remembered because he had a vision, intelligence, moral courage, and theological ability, which he used to express his beliefs.<sup>292</sup> He has been considered a martyr because he gave his life to what he believed was God's will;<sup>293</sup> but it would be wrong to label him this without acknowledging that he represents a different type of martyr who is not saintly, but human; covered in guilt and firm in responsibility.<sup>294</sup> He was an ordinary individual who knew he did not have all the answers yet embarked on a courageous journey to discover them, and he practiced what he preached, and for this he has become a powerful witness who is relatable to ordinary individuals.<sup>295</sup> His realistic and dedicated approaches continue to inspire people.<sup>296</sup>

## Conclusion

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has challenged and encouraged Christians, theologians and secular individuals through his life, death, writings and ethical theology. There were many factors meaning the Christian Churches were reluctant to resist the regime, and whilst the Jehovah's Witnesses hold a well known place in resistance history for their martyrdom, Bonhoeffer is undoubtedly unique not only for his resistance, but because his ethical theology coupled with resistance, informed his life and decisions. Therefore, to celebrate only one of

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<sup>290</sup> Wayne Whiteson Floyd Jr., "Bonhoeffer's Literary Legacy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 71.

<sup>291</sup> Mengus, "Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," 135.

<sup>292</sup> Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," 213.

<sup>293</sup> Smith, "Reclaiming Bonhoeffer," 213.

<sup>294</sup> Bethge, "Turning Points in Bonhoeffer Life and Thought," 100.

<sup>295</sup> John D. Godsey, "The Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *A Bonhoeffer Legacy*, ed. A. J. Klassen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 169.

<sup>296</sup> Hopper, *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer*, 132.

these things is to do an injustice to Bonhoeffer's legacy. As a Christian individual suffering through Nazi Germany, Bonhoeffer lay down his life in obedience to the will of God. Through remaining records of his profound thoughts, he has been endorsed universally, as his ethical theology encourages and challenges Christians and non-Christians alike about ethics and morals. He has inspired and encouraged those who are bored with dogmatic principles;<sup>297</sup> and calls us to live with responsibility and compassion for others as we embrace the world.<sup>298</sup> Despite many academics who have analysed, interpreted and represented Bonhoeffer's works, Bethge remains the most accurate authority of Bonhoeffer's legacy. He shared Bonhoeffer's life with the world, a story of family solidarity, faithfulness, courage, compassion, and true patriotism.<sup>299</sup> Bethge knew the importance of what Bonhoeffer said, did, and symbolised, thus ensured the world would know his name and life: a story of moral courage, risks, resistance and theology. It is also through countless biographers, theologians and historians who have analysed, critiqued and represented Bonhoeffer that we realise his resistance differed from other Christians during Nazi Germany. This is because his behaviour developed from his desire to obey the will of God, and meant he was prepared to lay down his life for his faith. It is due to the complexity and richness of Bonhoeffer's achievement that he continues to fascinate us, even seventy years on.

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<sup>297</sup> Hopper, *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer*, 20.

<sup>298</sup> Hunter, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 92.

<sup>299</sup> Nelson, "The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 22.

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