



Bonhoeffer: Discipleship Towards the World

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This-worldly Christianity

- ▶ “I'm still discovering, right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing, we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God.”

Ethics – following the dynamic Jesus back INTO the world with all its ambiguities

- ▶ “Because Jesus took the guilt of all human beings upon himself, everyone who acts responsibly becomes guilty. Those who, in acting responsibly seek to avoid becoming guilty, divorce themselves from the ultimate reality of history, that is from the redeeming mystery of the sinless bearing of guilt by Jesus Christ, and have no part in the divine justification that attends this event. They place their personal innocence above their responsibility for other human beings and are blind to the fact that precisely in doing so they become even more egregious guilty.” – Ethics
- ▶ Hard to avoid reading this in connection with the plot to assassinate Hitler
- ▶ Can Jesus lead us into sin?
- ▶ Again, against ethical formalism – we follow a dynamic Christ; recall that earlier for Bonhoeffer this is embodied in the church, although now he is discovering that many atheists have a better grasp on idolatry in relation to Hitler than do many Christians

“Religionless” Christianity

- ▶ “What keeps gnawing at me is the question, what is Christianity, or who is Christ actually for us today? The age when we could tell people that with words—whether with theological or with pious words—is past, as is the age of inwardness and of conscience, and that means the age of religion altogether. We are approaching a completely religionless age; people as they are now simply cannot be religious anymore. Even those who honestly describe themselves as ‘religious’ aren’t really practicing that at all; they presumably mean something quite different by ‘religious.’”
- ▶ “If religion is only the garb in which Christianity is clothed—and this garb has looked very different in different ages—what then is religionless Christianity?”- Letters and Papers from Prison

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- ▶ “What matters is not the beyond but this world, how it is created and preserved, is given laws, reconciled, and renewed. What is beyond this world is meant, in the gospel, to be there for this world—not in the anthropocentric sense of liberal, mystical, pietistic, ethical theology, but in the biblical sense of the creation and the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”
 - ▶ “The same God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The same God who makes us to live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God, and with God, we live without God.”
 - ▶ “The world come of age is more god-less and perhaps just because of that closer to God than the world not yet come of age.”



“Religion” in LPP...

- ▶ Stands for any mode of piety that removes us from going as fully into the world as Jesus did – simplifying ambiguity and keeping ourselves clean instead of becoming guilty with the world
- ▶ For Bonhoeffer, we might say that Christians are called to love the world more than the world loves itself, precisely for incarnational reasons.
- ▶ Notice the dynamic shift: initially, Bonhoeffer’s theology follows Christ out the world. BUT FOLLOWING CHRIST ULTIMATELY INVOLVES GOING MORE DEEPLY INTO THE WORLD’S AMBIGUITIES THAN THE AVERAGE SECULAR PERSON!



Is LPP a radical shift? Continuity or discontinuity?

- ▶ How do Life Together and LPP fit together?
 - ▶ Psalms- Bible conveying living Christ
 - ▶ Embodied church as safeguard against projection
 - ▶ LPP – “arcane” discipline, plus a number of references to religionless Christianity in the baptismal sermon for Bethge’s son
- ▶ Thesis: Continuity: thick Christian practice is not “religion” in the sense of removing ourselves from the world’s ambiguities; it is embodied incarnational formation in community



Bonhoeffer bequeaths a conundrum of which we was quite conscious when he died...

- ▶ How to fit together thick ecclesial communal practice with a kind of Christological self-forgetfulness that allows Christians to go deeper into the world than the world is, love the world more than the world loves itself, and to be more “secular” than the world itself?
- ▶ I believe this conundrum is the most generative for the next 500 years
 - ▶ Worship – deep sacramentology that has Christology as its basis (Luther: third mode of Christ’s presence)
 - ▶ Formation in the living Christ
 - ▶ Vital embodied communities apart from the trappings and cultural advantage of “religion”