

# **Grace: Free, Costly, or Cheap?**

**A close engagement with Bonhoeffer's cheap and costly grace in *Discipleship*.**

*Written by Virginia Ingram Btheol*

## **Declaration**

This thesis is presented for the Honours degree of Theology of Murdoch University. 2011.

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its Main content, work that has not been submitted for a degree at any tertiary Education institution.

.....

Virginia Ingram

# Copyright

# Contents

Grace: Free, Costly, or Cheap? .....	1
Declaration .....	2
Copyright.....	3
Contents.....	4
Abstract .....	6
Acknowledgements .....	8
Grace: Free, Costly, or Cheap? .....	9
A close engagement with Bonhoeffer’s cheap and costly grace in <i>Discipleship</i> .....	9
Introduction .....	9
Chapter One: Background Theology.....	14
Introduction .....	14
Law and Gospel.....	14
Luther and the Christian in the World.....	18
Luther’s doctrine of the ‘three estates’ .....	18
Luther’s doctrine of the ‘two kingdoms’ .....	20
Conclusion.....	22
Chapter Two: Cheap Grace .....	23
Introduction .....	23
Costly Grace as Discipleship in the Synoptics.....	24
Cheap Grace as an Ironic Presentation of Grace.....	26
Kierkegaard and Irony.....	28
Summary of Cheap Grace .....	30
History of Cheap Grace.....	30
Bonhoeffer’s exposition of cheap grace.....	33
Introduction .....	33
‘bargain-basement goods’ / ‘grace as doctrine, as principle, as system’ .....	34
‘cut-rate forgiveness’ / ‘forgiveness of sins as a general truth’ .....	36
‘cut-rate comfort’ / ‘God’s love as merely a Christian idea of God’ .....	37
‘cut-rate sacrament; grace as the church’s inexhaustible pantry, from which it is doled out by careless hands without hesitation..... or limit’ / ‘The church that teaches this doctrine of grace..... thereby confers such grace upon itself’ .....	39
‘It is grace without a price, without costs. It is said that the bill is paid for in advance for all time. Everything can be had for free, courtesy of that paid bill’ / ‘Cheap grace is thus the denial of God’s living word’ .....	41
‘Cheap grace means justification of the sin but not the sinner’ .....	43
Conclusion.....	44
Chapter Three: Costly Grace .....	46
Introduction .....	46
Definition: Costly Grace.....	47
Discipleship .....	48
‘It is costly, because it calls to discipleship; it is grace, because it calls people to follow <i>Jesus Christ</i> .’ .....	48
Obedience/The Sermon on the Mount.....	51

Kingdom of Heaven .....	54
Self-Denial.....	58
‘It is costly, because it costs people their lives; it is grace,.....	58
because it thereby makes them live.’ .....	58
Justification of the Sinner.....	61
justifies the sinner.’ .....	61
Judgement / Theology of the Cross / Theology of Incarnation.....	63
‘Above all, grace is costly, because it was costly to God, .....	63
because it costs God the life of God’s Son - “you were bought.....	63
with a price” and because nothing can be cheap to us which is.....	63
costly to God. Above all, it is grace because the life of God’s .....	63
Son was not too costly for God to give in order to make us live. ....	63
Costly grace is the incarnation of God.’ .....	63
Judgement.....	64
Theology of the Cross .....	66
Theology of the Incarnation .....	69
Conclusion.....	70
Chapter Four: Contemporary Criticism of Costly.....	71
Grace .....	71
Introduction .....	71
Pneumatology.....	73
Christology .....	76
Works Righteousness .....	78
Conclusion.....	81
Conclusion To the Entire Thesis .....	83
Bonhoeffer’s assessment of Discipleship.....	83
Findings .....	84
Bibliography.....	87

## Abstract

This thesis examines the concept of cheap and costly grace in *Discipleship* within the context of Bonhoeffer's theological, and historical background. I shall argue that cheap grace is not grace but rather an ironic statement that Bonhoeffer created in reaction to Lutheran theologians who denied the role of works as a necessary response to faith. Bonhoeffer believed that these Lutherans centred their theology on traditions and Creeds, rather than accepting Christ's call to discipleship, and neighbourly love.

Costly grace, in contrast to cheap grasp is characterised by faith which is active in obedience to Christ. Bonhoeffer calls costly grace the call to discipleship, and expects Christians to accept the operational consequences of obedience. These consequences are suffering, persecution, and possibly even martyrdom. However, costly grace is not only a call to action. Costly grace is grace, which means that a Christian comes closer to God, and the truth of their existence through living a life of obedience and discipleship.

However, Bonhoeffer's theology of costly grace is not without criticism; and I will propose that Bonhoeffer's treatise of 'Costly Grace' is lacking an adequate theology of the Holy Spirit, overly Christocentric, and can be accused of taking away the central Reformation tenet of grace as a gift. I will propose that all of these criticisms can be explained by Bonhoeffer's life setting. For example, a lack of Pneumatology, and an overly represented Christology was a product of Bonhoeffer Lutheran background and the Christocentric theology of the day. Moreover, it can be argued that Bonhoeffer's belief that faith must be expressed in concrete acts of obedience was a product of what Bonhoeffer perceived as the

need of the church, at a time when Nationalism, and Germanism had overtaken Christian beliefs.

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks go to my supervisor Dr. Alexander Jensen for encouraging this line of research, guiding my inquiry, and assisting me with the practical concerns of creating a thesis.

Thanks also go to Dr. Erich von Dietze for sharing details of his grandfather's connection with Bonhoeffer in the *Abwehr* resistance movement.



## **Grace: Free, Costly, or Cheap?**

### **A close engagement with Bonhoeffer's cheap and costly grace in *Discipleship*.**

#### ***Introduction***

I became interested in writing a thesis on 'Costly Grace' after reading about Michael Bray. Bray is an assistant Lutheran pastor in America who endorses, and has gone to prison for bombing abortion clinics and venues popularly frequented by homosexuals. Bray states that his actions are influenced by Bonhoeffer's theology. To be more specific, Bray believes that imprisonment and the public's opposition to his crimes are the cost he incurs for doing God's will.<sup>1</sup> Thankfully, at the end of my year of research I can say I find no such justification for violence in Bonhoeffer's work; if anything *Discipleship*<sup>2</sup> can be characterised by its passive resistance.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Bray's interpretation of 'costly grace' was not the only interpretation which alarmed me. Around the same time I attended a church service where I and a full congregation were warned about, and accused of performing, cheap grace. All of sudden things had hit home, and I needed to know just exactly what were cheap and costly grace.

In this thesis I will look at 'Costly Grace' from a critical/historical perspective; and give an in-depth discussion on the connection between faith and uncompromising action which is the central motif of Bonhoeffer's work at this time.

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Bray. *A Time to Kill: A Study Concerning the Use of Force and Abortion*. (Oregon: Advocates for Life Publications, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> In this work I am using the Works edition of *Discipleship*, which is otherwise known as, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Introduction to the English edition' in, *Discipleship*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 4. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001). Pp. 7-16.

In the first chapter I will give a concise explanation of the Lutheran doctrines of ‘law and gospel’, the ‘two kingdoms’ and the ‘three estates.’ These doctrines are the background theology to Bonhoeffer’s treatise on cheap and costly grace. In the second chapter titled Cheap Grace, I will suggest that cheap grace is an ironic statement, which is used to highlight certain practices within the church that are seen by Bonhoeffer to be destructive. I will do this by looking at Kierkegaard’s influence on Bonhoeffer and positing that Bonhoeffer was using Kierkegaard’s model of irony to search for the truth in faith. I will then explore the history of cheap grace, as it is contained within the text of ‘Costly Grace’.

After looking at the background material, I will begin to investigate Bonhoeffer’s explicit designations of cheap grace. These are, 1) ‘grace as doctrine, principle, as system’,<sup>4</sup> which is an idea of grace which does not require concrete expression; 2) ‘forgiveness of sins as a general truth’,<sup>5</sup> otherwise spoken of as forgiveness without repentance; 3) ‘God’s love as merely a Christian idea of God’,<sup>6</sup> for Bonhoeffer this is a superficial form of comfort that disciples find in universal ideas, rather than in following Christ’s commands. Bonhoeffer also designates as cheap grace 4) the idea of sacraments which comfort Christians but do away with the need to follow Christ’s commands also; 5) ‘...the denial of God’s living word’<sup>7</sup> or a denial of Christ’s ministry which involved real pain, and suffering, rather than a belief that Christ’s atoning death absolves Christians from following Christ’s commandments. 6) ‘Justification of sin but not the sinner’<sup>8</sup> was Bonhoeffer’s remark against these ideas which did not make a Christian righteous, but instead excused sin.

---

<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

The commonality of all of these statements expresses Bonhoeffer's dismay that church members are not active in obedience to Christ. Yet, there is a difference between Bonhoeffer and the preacher I spoke of earlier. Whereas the preacher was concerned that members of the community weren't *doing* enough, Bonhoeffer was concerned that Christians weren't *being* enough. In other words the preacher I spoke of was talking of good works as something which would earn us favour, whereas Bonhoeffer's prime consideration was that Christians should conform to Christ through faith and then enact their faith in obedience. In doing so Christians become part of the body of Christ, and Christ's living presence in the world. This distinction is fundamental when looking at Bonhoeffer's theology, because costly grace can never be described as good works which are not a product of faith in Christ.

In the third chapter titled 'Costly Grace' I will re-capitulate my thesis that costly grace is a call to discipleship in the living Word of God; and I will examine the cost and grace nuances which Bonhoeffer makes in his treatise. The first section I will write about is the overarching theme of 'discipleship'. I will suggest the cost aspect is the difficulty in following Christ's commands, and that the graced aspect is the joy which comes with fellowship with Christ. Under the heading 'Discipleship' I will look at the Sermon on the Mount, which sets forth the kind of obedience required by a disciple; and I will explain Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is a look at the corporate effect of discipleship.

The section titled 'Self-Denial'; will focus on Bonhoeffer's belief that Christians must deny themselves before Christ. The cost element of self-denial to the disciple is a loss of self which comes about in conforming to Christ. This

process involves taking on Christ's suffering and persecution. The graced aspect of the event is for the disciple to know himself or herself and to be completely embraced by the truth. 'Justification of the Sinner' is another area of Bonhoeffer's theology in which there is a cost involved. The cost is the condemnation of sins and grace is seen in a movement away from sins.

Similarly Bonhoeffer's theology of 'judgement' addresses sin and God's reconciling action of moving the righteous away from sin. The cost involved in this action is repentance; but grace is mercy. The section entitled; 'The theology of the cross' speaks of the cost of suffering, humiliation, and rejection which confronts the disciple, and the grace of joining Christ in his Passion which brings new life. This is where Bonhoeffer begins to merge discipleship with Christ's being, as he states that the cross is a cost for God, as is 'the theology of the incarnation' that I address in the section that follows. This merging of our existence with God's is the goal of Bonhoeffer's theology.

Much of Bonhoeffer's theology in *Discipleship* points to his life setting. He not only wrote this work at the height of the Second World War in Germany; but also as a Nazi antagonist, leading an illegal seminary for a schismatic church. Suffice to say Bonhoeffer's theology makes bold statements, which are designed to energise those who are in the trenches with him, so to speak. However, Bonhoeffer's theology of costly grace, when read today in peaceful communities is commonly removed from Bonhoeffer's unique context. For example, I experienced it as part of the religious experience at a local church. Therefore his bold remarks and enjoinders must be used with caution. In my fourth chapter, titled 'Contemporary Criticisms of "Costly Grace,"' I will address often expressed concerns with Bonhoeffer's theology of 'costly grace'.

The main concerns fall in three different areas; Pneumatology, Christology, and works righteousness. In the first section I will discuss what most scholars perceive as an underdeveloped Pneumatology. However, I will also raise the claim that it is adequate for Bonhoeffer to subsume his theology of the Holy Spirit into his Christology. In the second section I will present the discussion concerning the psychological and environmental influences which can be seen to distort Bonhoeffer's Christology. In the last section I will present two different arguments which perceive costly grace as dependant on good works, regardless of Bonhoeffer's assertion that this is not the case.

It is my own view that the essence of Bonhoeffer's work is to make Christ present in the world; and this is achieved through grace. Interestingly, at least three of the scholars mentioned in this critical chapter share the same operational focus of theology; yet they diverge markedly from Bonhoeffer's theology in which he seems to try and force people to be socially active. For me, the sense of theological duress that is found in Bonhoeffer's emphasis on eternal judgement and damnation of sinners, takes away the freedom of grace, if the term 'costly grace' has not done that already.

As long as God demands costly grace from us, pastors are no longer mediating God's word, but they have become God's enforcers. When this kind of attitude is taken to the extreme we see Fundamentalists such as the associate pastor, and leader of 'God's army,' Michael Bray, enforcing 'god's will' with the most devastating results. Therefore, as unfair as it may seem to us at times, God's grace must be available to all of us in equal doses, including the prostitute, the criminal, and even the persecutor of Christians.

However, my thesis is not focused on the merits of universal grace, even though the contrast between cheap and costly grace from this perspective is a suggestion I make for future research. In this thesis I am concerning myself only with a close engagement with 'Costly Grace' to explain what Bonhoeffer means when he speaks of cheap and costly grace in order to learn where we may benefit from his scholarship; and where we need to be cautious.

## **Chapter One: Background Theology**

### ***Introduction***

In order to understand Bonhoeffer's teachings on costly grace it is necessary to give a brief overview on the Lutheran theology which not only informs his writing but is also a point of divergence for both Bonhoeffer, and the Lutheran theologians who Bonhoeffer is writing against. In the following sections I will outline Luther's doctrine of 'law and grace' and present an overview of Luther's doctrines on the 'two kingdoms' and the 'three estates.' It could be said very simply that 'law and gospel' speaks of works and faith; the doctrine of the 'two kingdoms' situates Christian in relation to the government, and the doctrine of the 'three estates' refers to a Christian's vocation in the world.

### ***Law and Gospel***

In the treatise *Concerning Christian Liberty* Luther outlines his view of the relationship between Law and Gospel. An introduction to this argument is as follows: righteousness and freedom brought about by faith in the gospel; through the laws sinfulness is exposed and the individual seeks salvation in Christ. Yet, Christ's action on the cross fulfils the laws. Faith creates obedience to Christ in all things; good works are an extension of this obedience. Believers empty

themselves and take on Christ. Christ in turn takes on the sin, death, and damnation of the Christian and exchanges it for grace, life, and salvation. This exchange allows the faithful to take on Christ's priesthood role and ministry of love to neighbours; however, spiritual perfection cannot be ours in this life, and repentance is still important. With this in mind we can consider the two major propositions Luther makes concerning the spirit in his statement, 'A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all' Christian is free by faith, and a Lord of all by taking on Christ. By taking on Christ, the believer is a servant of all, and subject to all, as this is Christ's nature.

Luther declares that human nature has two different parts; one is the body, the other is the spirit.<sup>9</sup> This distinction is important for Luther as he maintains that no external acts of the body can produce righteousness or freedom. Righteousness and freedom are brought about through the Word of God, which is the gospel of Christ. Thereby, as the sinner finds faith through the gospel it is only faith which justifies the sinner. Works can be preformed in a graced state; however works do not justify a sinner as works do not need faith.<sup>10</sup> For example, certain religious rituals can be preformed by people without faith.<sup>11</sup>

Faith is, in Luther's terms, saving and efficacious when it exposes a person's sinfulness. This awareness leads a person to accept the condemnation which comes with sin, and prompts them to seek righteousness and salvation.<sup>12</sup> Thereby, the believer turns to Christ who forgives all sins and justifies sinners

---

<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 346.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 345

<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 346.

through his own death and resurrection.<sup>13</sup> In doing so, the laws (or commandments) are fulfilled in Christ, who promises to give grace to the believer.<sup>14</sup> The laws, therefore are responsible for bringing a person to the realisation, that they are sinful and unable to do right of their own accord. They also have a purpose in restraining evil. Moreover, as the commandments are fulfilled by the promise of God, all of the works of the believer are done for the benefit of God, which keeps the Christian righteous as they cannot claim the virtue of the work for themselves.<sup>15</sup>

However, faith is not idle, and Luther expects, as a consequence of faith, that the believer, will express their reverence and love for God in acts of obedience. Obedience is distinct from works alone as it is contingent upon faith. Conversely, Luther believes those who believe in works related salvation are denying God's promise of grace, and thereby faith. As such, these people will not be saved.<sup>16</sup> Yet, for Luther, faith is not merely a matter of imitating Christ; faith unites the soul with Christ in a sacred marriage, drawing on the biblical imagery of Christ as bride, and the soul as bridegroom. In this union an exchange takes place, in which Christ takes upon himself the sin, death, and condemnation of the sinner, whilst the soul takes on Christ's grace, life, and salvation.<sup>17</sup> The Christian thereby takes on Christ's roles as priest and king. In these roles the believer follows Christ in his invisible role as an intercessor to God, but also in a visible role praying and preaching.<sup>18</sup> The appellations king and priest are not meant to imply earthly status and power.

---

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 345.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 348.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 363.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 350.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 351.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 345.



Luther relies heavily on a theology of the cross, whereby Christ's vulnerability is his strength and ours as well. By virtue of being Christ's co-heirs and fellow-priests Christians are afforded the freedom to come directly into the presence of God, take on God's rule over death, and sin; and become all powerful.<sup>19</sup> This freedom is achieved in faith and not by works;<sup>20</sup> with Luther remarking good works can be harmful to a person if they divert the person from cultivating their faith,<sup>21</sup> or if they deceive the person into believing that they are justified by their own works.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, as the Christian is obedient to Christ and conformed to Christ as the bridegroom it is necessary to actively respect the gospel command to love your neighbour.<sup>23</sup> In doing so, Luther remarks that the Christian offers himself or herself to others, just as Christ had come to them. In actively helping people in need, we become what Luther calls, 'truly Christian.' Being 'truly Christian' is not only a reference to actively helping our neighbour, but also to lovingly helping our neighbour for no reward as we feel the presence of God within us.<sup>24</sup> The Christian emptied of himself or herself lives for God through faith, and through a neighbour in love; which has a flowing on effect as new Christians are created.<sup>25</sup>

However, justification by faith alone leaves a Christian still lacking as Luther remarks the faithful are not perfected until the eschaton.<sup>26</sup> Thereby, repentance is an important aspect of his theology. Although, Luther writes that the

---

<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 355.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 346.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 358.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 363.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 365.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 368.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 363.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 358.

law points a person to the need for repentance, however, without the gospel or grace this call for repentance on its own is destructive for the Christian.<sup>27</sup>

In conclusion, Luther was opposed to theology which suggested righteousness was created through good works. The basis of his argument was that anybody regardless of faith could do good works, and although there was nothing wrong with doing good works, they did not draw a person further into being what Luther calls a true Christian. In order to be a true Christian, Luther believed an individual first comes to Christ in faith, then through self-denial takes on Christ as a new identity, and lives life as Christ. In doing so, the Christian does good works, as this is what Christ did in his ministry of love. But the emphasis is solely on Christ and not on works per se. The individual finds salvation and grace in Christ's nature, whereas good works on their own cannot provide the believer with this guarantee. Moreover, Luther makes the distinction that those with faith are servants by their own free-will, without any kind of coercion.

## ***Luther and the Christian in the World***

### **Luther's doctrine of the 'three estates'**

The estate system in Germany was a class system, which existed from medieval times, and was comprised of three distinct stratas. Originally a person's 'estate' or station in life was seen to have been given before birth which contributed to the idea of status without merit. It has been suggested that this kind of social ordering was what Luther was seeking to reform with his doctrine of the 'three estates.'<sup>28</sup> However, I believe that this kind of interpretation is overly-simplistic, and prefer

---

<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 364.

<sup>28</sup> *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*. Ed. Hans J. Hilldebrand. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). P. 65.

the view expressed by Bern Wannewetsch. He states that Luther is not looking to create a sociological model of existence in his doctrine of the 'three estates,' but is rather looking to suggest the means for social life within the framework of faith and obedience.

Therefore, Luther views the estates not in terms of social hierarchy, but as different spheres from which to do God's work. As such Luther posits that all people who are justified by faith are of the same spiritual estate. This way of thinking does away with the pride and elitism which comes with secular segregations. Furthermore, Luther suggests that the only reason for earthly vocations is in order to do God's will, which is why he places so much importance on the need to be faithful to God within ones vocation.<sup>29</sup>

The three estates are the *ecclesia*, *oeconomia*, and *politica*<sup>30</sup> or church, household, and state. And Luther saw each estate not only as a means of helping the world flourish by Christians doing God's will; but he also saw the estates as a means of ongoing sanctification for the Christian. The reason Luther gives for this assertion is that these estates are holy because they are instituted by God, and made holy through his word. However, they are not means of salvation. Salvation is through Christ alone.<sup>31</sup>

In conclusion: Under Luther's doctrine of the 'three estates' the social class structure which existed in Germany is done away. The reason for this is because Luther maintained that all of the estates were instituted by God and were a means for the faithful to become holy. Furthermore, Luther saw the estates as spiritual vocations which helped to make the world grow in the eyes of God.

---

<sup>29</sup> Bernd Wannewetsch. 'Luther's Moral Theology' in, *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). P. 130.

<sup>30</sup> *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*. Vol. 2. Ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand. P. 65.

<sup>31</sup> Bernd Wannewetsch. 'Luther's Moral Theology.' P. 132.

However, it was the estate of the state, and a person's relationship to it which caused the most difficulty, and is examined further in Luther's doctrine of the 'two kingdoms'.

### **Luther's doctrine of the 'two kingdoms'**

Luther's doctrine of the 'Two Kingdoms' has the idea of two different spheres of influence in the world as its foundation. These spheres of influence are either spiritual or temporal; however, although Luther advocated that the church was concerned with the spiritual sphere and the state with the temporal, he still maintained both bodies were under God's authority.

Luther's doctrine 'two kingdoms' has been hailed as the beginning of the separation of church and state, yet this is not entirely true. Luther wanted to reduce corruption in the church and for this reason he reduced the power of clerics and increased the power of the laity. In his tract *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung*, (To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the improvement of the Christian Estate) Luther championed the freedom of the temporal 'sword' from church authority in order that the secular power (so long as they were baptized Christians) could be used to reform the church<sup>32</sup>.

Luther developed this idea in later tracts, most notably *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei* (Concerning Secular Government, How it is to be Obeyed; 1523); where he declared that governments

---

<sup>32</sup> *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*. Vol. 4. Ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 184

are divinely instituted offices, which do God's will on earth. Luther believed that both spheres were vocation related and not determined by a person's station in life.

The problem of the changing relationship between the church and state, meant Christians were subject to the secular law, and the commands of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:39), which were sometimes in tension. With this in mind, Luther wrote two of his definitive works on the powers of temporal government called, *Temporal Authority* and *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved*, respectively.

*Temporal Authority* is divided into three sections. The first section outlines Luther's belief that temporal government is ordained by God. God does this not for the sake of true Christians, because they live by love and grace, but as a means to control those who do evil, protect the good, and to keep the peace. The second section outlines the powers of temporal government. Luther maintains that the government has no power over the soul, but does have control over bodies and goods. The third part of Luther's treatise, outlines the way a prince should rule<sup>33</sup>. In the second section Luther famously uses Romans 12 to demonstrate that all governing authority is ordained by God, and anyone who does not obey their government will receive judgement<sup>34</sup>. However, Luther clearly states that there are limits to what civilians should accept from the government<sup>35</sup>.

In Luther's later work entitled, *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved*, Luther considers the legitimate use of force by the military. This material, unfortunately, further challenged Christians in Nazi Germany, when Luther uses

---

<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther, 'Temporal Authority' in, *Luther's Works Vol. 45*. Ed. Walter I. Brandt. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962). P. 79.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Luther. 'Temporal Authority.' Pp. 85-86.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther. 'Temporal Authority.' P. 111.

Romans 13 to declare that both war and killing are instituted by God in order to punish the evil and to keep the peace<sup>36</sup>. Yet, Luther does make provision for despotic rulers, and states that any prince acts in a manner which is insane then he may be deposed of as he has lost his reason and is no longer to be considered a man<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, any soldier who knows his lord to be wrong is accountable to God and conscience and must therefore obey God<sup>38</sup>.

In conclusion, Luther's doctrine of the 'Two Kingdoms' which is sometimes referred to as the separation of church and state, was not a complete separation of powers. The government was still seen to be under God's rule. The church on the other hand, which was in charge of proclaiming the gospel and saving souls, was not to intervene in government business, as the government was divinely ordained and did not need such intrusion. The government, being a secular power, had authority over people's bodies and goods; and was appointed to control evil, protect the good, and keep the peace. However, these tasks were not applicable to true Christians who did not need any kind of external restrictions because they were conformed to Christ's nature, and full of grace.

## **Conclusion**

Bonhoeffer's work on cheap and costly grace has many different influences which I will mention throughout this thesis. However, the influence of Luther is the most important for a few different reasons. First, Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor, and his basic framework of theology was distinctly Lutheran; Second, Bonhoeffer lived in an environment which was strongly influenced by Luther's writings;

---

<sup>36</sup> Martin Luther. 'Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved' in, *Luther's Works Vol. 46*. Ed. Robert C. Shultz. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). P. 95.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Luther. 'Whether Soldiers Too, Can be Saved.' P. 105

<sup>38</sup> Martin Luther. 'Whether Soldiers Too, Can be Saved.' P..130

Third, because Germany was still trying to understand the cultural implications of the Reformation, and Fourth, because Bonhoeffer had a great reverence for Luther.

In the next chapter I will examine some of the ways in which Bonhoeffer believed that Luther's theology had been distorted. All of these 'distortions' share what Bonhoeffer views as a lack of neighbourly love which is concrete and acted out in the world.

## **Chapter Two: Cheap Grace**

### ***Introduction***

The main point of Bonhoeffer's argument in 'costly grace' is that the church is where grace is, and that grace is the living word of God, who calls people to discipleship.<sup>39</sup> A life of discipleship is therefore the right relationship to have with God. When Bonhoeffer speaks of 'cheap grace' he is not only speaking of the antithesis of costly grace, but also speaking of the deceptive element which occurs in a church that purports to offer a relationship with God but does not. This church is the enemy of the true church of Christ. For Bonhoeffer, the church which is built on cheap grace leaves people in their sins and cannot offer salvation.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the following question, which Bonhoeffer asks in *Discipleship*, could be considered his over-riding concern for writing this treatise; 'Is the price that we are paying today with the collapse of the organized churches anything else but an inevitable consequence of grace acquired too cheaply?'<sup>41</sup>

In order to fully appreciate Bonhoeffer's thoughts on cheap grace I will give a brief outline of 'costly grace' as its meaning informs the meaning of

---

<sup>39</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>40</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>41</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 53.

cheap grace. I suggest that cheap grace is not grace at all. Instead I propose the term ‘cheap grace’ is a sarcastic and ironic statement which highlights what Bonhoeffer believes is an erroneous use of the word grace by contemporaneous Lutherans. I believe that Bonhoeffer is using irony as a means of teasing out the truth in the debate about the nature of grace.

After providing a background to the history of cheap grace as it is found in ‘costly grace’, I will explain cheap grace (which I have suggested is not grace) in greater depth according to Bonhoeffer’s own designations. These include; ‘cheap grace as doctrine, principle, as system;<sup>42</sup> ‘forgiveness of sins as a general truth;<sup>43</sup> ‘God’s love as merely a Christian idea of God;<sup>44</sup> ‘a denial of God’s living word;<sup>45</sup> and cheap grace as the justification of sins.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Costly Grace as Discipleship in the Synoptics.***

As cheap grace is the negative expression of costly grace,<sup>47</sup> it is necessary to establish what Bonhoeffer means in his writings when he refers to costly grace. I will argue that costly grace *is* grace as it is articulated in the gospel and discipleship.<sup>48</sup>

The book *Discipleship* is a composition of Bonhoeffer’s notes, lectures, manuscripts, and other disparate pieces of work; which were written over a period of many years and finally compiled as a published work in 1937. The crisis of the Church Struggle in Germany was the backdrop for many of these writings and the

---

<sup>42</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>43</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>44</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>46</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>47</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>48</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45



students at the Finkenwalde seminary, of which Bonhoeffer was a director, were the primary target audience.<sup>49</sup>

Before examining Bonhoeffer's treatise entitled *Costly Grace*, I think it is important to note that I am working from the English edition of the *Bonhoeffer Works* series. In this translation of *Discipleship* the editor's have divided the book into two clear sections;<sup>50</sup> the first section deals with discipleship as it is presented in the synoptic gospels and the second section concerns Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the call to discipleship which is inherent in baptism.<sup>51</sup>

The first section which contains the chapter on *Costly Grace* is untitled in the *Bonhoeffer Works* edition; however, in Bonhoeffer's pre-publication version it was titled, *Discipleship in the Synoptics*.<sup>52</sup> In my opinion the editors of the English works edition have presented *Discipleship* in a way which gives the book over-all coherence and is clear and faithful to Bonhoeffer's intentions for the collection of works. However, as I am interested in a detailed look at the first chapter which is *Costly Grace*, I believe the original designation, *Discipleship in the Synoptics*, may help to provide insight into the somewhat ambiguous terms cheap and costly grace; and also give us more of an insight into Bonhoeffer's rhetorical style.

If we consider the chapter on costly grace as linked to the over-riding idea of 'Discipleship in the Synoptics,' it is necessary to interpret both cheap and costly grace in reference to this umbrella concept. Doing so is helpful because Bonhoeffer's rhetoric sometimes detracts from a clear understanding of what grace means to him, for example, 'The Christian has to let grace truly be grace

---

<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editor's Introduction to the English Edition.' P. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Introduction to the English Edition.' P. 30.

<sup>51</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. "Editor' Introduction to the English Edition.' P. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. Footnote [1] in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

enough so that the world does not lose faith in this cheap grace.<sup>53</sup> When ‘costly grace’ is considered in reference to the umbrella term and the overall message of the book, which is one of following Christ in action,<sup>54</sup> it appears Bonhoeffer is clearest in his interpretation of costly grace when he remarks ‘*costly grace is the gospel*<sup>55</sup>’ and that costly grace is the word of God, which comes to us as an invitation to discipleship.<sup>56</sup>

For Bonhoeffer to define grace in terms of the gospel/word of God is to express discipleship in terms of the reality of Christ who becomes present in the church through the proclamation of the good news.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, it is possible that Bonhoeffer, who is known to be purposeful with his usage of words,<sup>58</sup> has included the Synoptic reference not only to indicate he will be writing about discipleship as it is illustrated in the gospels,<sup>59</sup> but also as a reminder to his audience of Luther’s Reformation theology which situated the church in terms of the promise of the gospel.<sup>60</sup> In conclusion, costly grace is the gospel, which articulates the word of God calling people to discipleship.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Cheap Grace as an Ironic Presentation of Grace.***

When Bonhoeffer speaks of cheap grace, he is making a sarcastic, ironic statement to indicate that cheap grace is the opposite of costly grace. Bonhoeffer’s assertion that costly grace is the living word of God,<sup>62</sup> whereas cheap grace is the

---

<sup>53</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

<sup>54</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. ‘Editors’ Introduction to the English Edition.’ P. 23.

<sup>55</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>56</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>57</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*. (Finkenwalde Lectures on Homiletics), translated by Clyde E. Fant. (Nashville: Nelson, 1975). P. 126. As found in, Frits De Lange. *Waiting for the Word*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000). P. 92.

<sup>58</sup> Frits De Lange. *Waiting for the Word*. P. 95.

<sup>59</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. ‘Editors’ Introduction to the English Edition.’ P. 30.

<sup>60</sup> Oswal Bayer. *Martin Luther’s Theology*. P. 58.

<sup>61</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>62</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

‘denial of God’s living word,<sup>63</sup>’ expresses this idea. Therefore, cheap grace is, as Jonathan Sorum points out, not really grace at all, whereas costly grace *is* grace.<sup>64</sup>

An in-depth definition of irony is beyond the scope of this paper, however, if we use the simple definition that irony is an expression intimating that the truth is found in the opposite of what is said;<sup>65</sup> there are clear examples of irony in Bonhoeffer’s chapter on costly grace. The following expressions highlight Bonhoeffer’s use of irony; ‘Thus, the Christian should live the same way the world does. In all things the Christian should go along with the world and not venture...to live a different life under grace from that under sin!’<sup>66</sup> And; ‘The Christian better not rage against grace or defile that glorious cheap grace by proclaiming a new servitude to the letter of the Bible in an attempt to live an obedient life under the commandments of Jesus Christ!’<sup>67</sup> Sarcasm, has a close relationship to irony, and is found in the cutting element of these remarks.<sup>68</sup> Sarcasm can be seen in the term ‘cheap’ which denotes little worth.

I believe Bonhoeffer used irony, and sarcasm in his speech on cheap grace because; First, he was speaking to an audience who were theologically and philosophically sophisticated enough to be receptive to his use of language;<sup>69</sup> Second: the use of irony can make an argument more provocative;<sup>70</sup> and Third, the use of sarcasm can encourage a sharper emotional engagement with the

---

<sup>63</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>64</sup> Jonathan D. Sorum, ‘Cheap Grace, Costly Grace and Just Plain Grace: Bonhoeffer’s Defense of Justification by Faith Alone’ in, *Lutheran Forum* 27, no.3 (August 1993). P. 20; as found in editor’s notes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*. P. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Alice Myers Roy. ‘The Function of Irony in Discourse’ in, *Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse*. Vol. 1. Issue 4, ISSN (Online) 1613-4117 Published online 12/11/2009. Pp. 407-443.

<sup>66</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

<sup>67</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

<sup>68</sup> Raymond W. Gibbs. ‘On the psycholinguists of sarcasm’ in, *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. General Vol. 115 (1). Published online March 1986. Pp. 3-15.

<sup>69</sup> Eberhard Bethge. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A Biography*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) p. 131.

<sup>70</sup> Debra Nail ‘Socrates’ in, *The Stamford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Spring 2010 Edition), Ed. Edward N. Zalta. URL=<http://plato.encyclopedia.edu/archives/spring2010/entires/socrates/>.

material.<sup>71</sup> Bonhoeffer used this strength of language in his argument as it reflected the importance of his message, which was Bonhoeffer's premise that cheap grace was the denial of Christ and the antitheses of the church.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, he used sarcasm to show his distaste for what he called cheap grace, and irony to provoke intellectual engagement with the topic. In the next section I will suggest that Bonhoeffer used irony as a means of coming closer to the truth.

### **Kierkegaard and Irony.**

One can clearly see the influence of Kierkegaard's book *The Concept of Irony*, on Bonhoeffer at the time of his writing *Discipleship*. We can deduce from this influence that Bonhoeffer was using the rhetorical tool of irony as a means to lead his audience into a deeper existential reality which is put forth in the book.<sup>73</sup>

Murray Rae in his work *Kierkegaard and Theology*, suggests that all of the ideas which Bonhoeffer expresses in his treatise on costly grace are paraphrased from Kierkegaard.<sup>74</sup> This proposition has merit when we consider the following quote from *The Concept of Irony*; 'Insights not only into man's secrets but into God's secrets are sold at such a bargain that it all begins to look rather suspicious. In our joy over the result we have forgotten that a result has no value in it if it has not actually been acquired.'<sup>75</sup> Bonhoeffer's statement that 'cheap grace means grace as bargain-basement goods;<sup>76</sup> is similar to Kierkegaard's remark '...God's

---

<sup>71</sup> S.G. Samay-Tsoory, R. Tomer & J. Aharon-Peretz. 'The Neuroanatomical Basis of Understanding Sarcasm and its Relationship to Social Cognition' in, *Neuropsychology*. Vol 19. No. 3. URL=<http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/205/05/sarcasm.aspx>

<sup>72</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>73</sup> Soren Kierkegaard. *The Concept of Irony*. (London:Collins, 1966). P. 339.

<sup>74</sup> Murray Rae. *Kierkegaard and Theology*. (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010). P. 151.

<sup>75</sup> Kierkegaard. *The Concept of Irony*. pp.339-340.

<sup>76</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

secrets are sold at such a bargain...'<sup>77</sup> and the idea of delusional joy which comes without merit<sup>78</sup> sums up the meaning of cheap grace.<sup>79</sup> Bonhoeffer also makes direct reference to Kierkegaard in the text,<sup>80</sup> as well as allusions to other works of Kierkegaard, including the *Journals and Papers*.<sup>81</sup>

However, although these connections are apparent, to call *Discipleship* a work that is completely paraphrased,<sup>82</sup> as Murray Rae does, suggests a lack of thought on Bonhoeffer's behalf. I believe instead, that Bonhoeffer treats his sources with a great deal of reverence, and makes clever, deliberate allusions to their work. When we consider that the following line in Kierkegaard's phrase above is; 'But woe to him who cannot tolerate the fact that irony seeks to balance accounts'<sup>83</sup> it is possible to maintain that Bonhoeffer was using irony in his description of cheap grace to 'balance accounts' or to bring forth the truth.

Further along in *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard writes that mastered irony leads people to the truth.<sup>84</sup> Jacob Golomb explores this concept further in his article, *Kierkegaard's ironic ladder to authentic faith*, and writes that Kierkegaard used irony as a means of facilitating an audience to seek authenticity, and to experience the life change which comes with that encounter.<sup>85</sup>

I do not believe that Bonhoeffer was being deliberately ambiguous when he spoke of cheap grace; on the contrary I believe his choices of words were purposeful and his choices of the rhetorical devices of irony and sarcasm were

---

<sup>77</sup> Kierkegaard. *The Concept of Irony*. P. 339.

<sup>78</sup> Kierkegaard. *The Concept of Irony*. P. 340.

<sup>79</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

<sup>80</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 51.

<sup>81</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 47.

<sup>82</sup> Murray Rae. *Kierkegaard and Theology*. P. 151.

<sup>83</sup> Kierkegaard. *The Concept of Theology*. P. 339.

<sup>84</sup> Kierkegaard. *The Concept of Irony*. P. 346.

<sup>85</sup> Jacob Golomb. 'Kierkegaard's ironic ladder to authentic faith' in, *Philosophy of Religion* 32. (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991). P. 1.

purposeful also. I suggest that the purpose behind Bonhoeffer using irony was in order to try to come to the truth.

### ***Summary of Cheap Grace***

In conclusion, Bonhoeffer's phrase 'cheap grace' is a remark which uses irony, and sarcasm. The irony is in the use of the word 'grace' because cheap grace which is a 'denial of the living word'<sup>86</sup> is in fact the opposite to grace; and 'cheap' is the sarcastic appellation. This is important to keep in mind when reading Bonhoeffer's work on 'cheap grace' as we know that Bonhoeffer does not want us to understand literally that grace is a doctrine,<sup>87</sup> nor does Bonhoeffer want us to believe that the church which believes grace is a doctrine, can 'confer...grace upon itself.'<sup>88</sup>

### ***History of Cheap Grace***

Before interpreting cheap, grace which is found in the body of this work, I will give a brief outline of the history of the cheap grace as Bonhoeffer presents it in *Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer's presentation is not exhaustive and is primarily intended to demonstrate that the history of the church moved from being the strong active community of disciples as found in the Bible, to being a diluted and ineffectual group of people who absolved themselves of personal responsibility in the world. This change took place for Bonhoeffer when the church became a universal institution in Rome, and the idea of diminished responsibility was strengthened by the popularity of monks as the obedient few. Bonhoeffer believed that Luther's doctrine of the 'two kingdoms' redeemed this passivity in the

---

<sup>86</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>87</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>88</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

church; yet, he also believed that popular interpretations of the ‘two kingdoms’ doctrine made the church regress back into this state of empty sacraments, and hollow words.<sup>89</sup>

Bonhoeffer attributes the beginning of cheap grace to the Christianization of Rome, whereby, grace became something that could be had by all without discipline and conviction.<sup>90</sup> In reaction to this free for all kind of spirituality, monasticism undertook adherence to an ascetic model of Christianity as a true symbol of Christ in the world. However, Bonhoeffer makes the point that the inability of monasticism, as the obedient few, to represent the majority; and for monks to remain humble whilst being exalted by the majority, meant that monasticism was not the answer. In *Discipleship*, he writes; ‘...the mistake was that monasticism essentially distanced itself from what is Christian by permitting its way to become the extraordinary achievement of a few, thereby claiming a special meritoriousness for itself.’<sup>91</sup>

The syntheses for Bonhoeffer seems to be Luther’s doctrine of the ‘Two Kingdoms’ whereby secular vocation was deemed to be ordained by God, and expected to be carried out in a godly fashion.<sup>92</sup> However, as Bonhoeffer writes in his treatise on costly grace, what became of Luther’s original teaching that justified sinners and called them deeper into discipleship, became popularly misinterpreted to mean grace without demonstrable discipleship.<sup>93</sup> In response to this, Bonhoeffer developed Luther’s doctrine of the ‘two kingdoms’ further by

---

<sup>89</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. Pp. 46-53.

<sup>90</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 46.

<sup>91</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 47.

<sup>92</sup> Martin Luther, ‘Temporal Authority’ in, *Luther’s Works Vol. 45*. P. 79.

<sup>93</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 49.

suggesting there should be no separation between secular life and Christian life; but one integrated existence in the here-and-now.<sup>94</sup>

Bonhoeffer remarks that part of the reason for radical anti-works theology was because the context of Luther's life had been omitted in the interpretation of his theses; and Lutherans had taken the 'conclusions' or the outcome of Luther's life of discipleship as 'presuppositions' or rather principles to be believed which did not depend on a life of dedicated service.<sup>95</sup>

Bonhoeffer called universal principles without action; 'the mortal enemy of the church,'<sup>96</sup> or cheap grace.<sup>97</sup> The danger of such theology for Bonhoeffer was that it not only failed to justify the sinner, but that by justifying sin, it became complicit in sin.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, Christians became complacent and weren't actively fighting for the church, (particularly the 'bourgeois-secular' who were the people who could have put up the best resistance). Bonhoeffer believed that in the theology of the all-sufficiency of grace, there was suddenly permission not to follow Jesus in concrete discipleship;<sup>99</sup> and he wrote, when justification of the sinner is taken as a presupposition and not as a conclusion it omits the life of discipleship which lies between the two spheres.

For Bonhoeffer presuppositions, or universal truths and abstract ideas, were the cruellest consequence of cheap-grace; as wrongly informed people who may have been eager to live a life of discipleship, were prevented from it and were stuck in disobedience.<sup>100</sup> Bonhoeffer had followed this thought for some

---

<sup>94</sup> Wolfgang Huber. 'Bonhoeffer and Modernity' in, *Theology and the Practise of Responsibility*. Ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., and Charles Marsh. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994. P. 12.

<sup>95</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 50.

<sup>96</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>97</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>98</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>99</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 50.

<sup>100</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 51.



time, as we see in *Act and Being*, where he writes that we must get rid of communities which propound to live in truth but in fact do not, as they obstruct people from a clear path to the truth.<sup>101</sup>

The truth for Bonhoeffer is only found in costly grace,<sup>102</sup> which is the gospel or the call to discipleship. Cheap grace is the antithesis of the truth as it does not lead to demonstrable discipleship.<sup>103</sup> Bonhoeffer is clear in making this point when he states; ‘I am liberated from following Jesus-by cheap grace, which has to be the bitterest enemy of discipleship.’<sup>104</sup>

## ***Bonhoeffer’s exposition of cheap grace***

### ***Introduction***

In order to give an in-depth account of Bonhoeffer’s treatise on cheap grace, I have decided to pair the ridiculing statements in the first paragraph, with their more revealing partners in the second paragraph. For example, the term ‘bargain basement goods’,<sup>105</sup> which is a parodying phrase, makes more sense when it is read in reference to ‘grace as doctrine, as principle, as system,’<sup>106</sup> which is a theological statement. The reason I have chosen to examine these remarks in such a way is because it appears to be a correlation Bonhoeffer had made (as indicated by the structure of the passage); and because it aids in comprehension. This is not a perfect means of discovery as some of these topics overlap, with only nuances separating them; however, it does give us a good impression of the kind of theology which Bonhoeffer was opposed to. The over-arching complaint that

---

<sup>101</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Act and Being*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 2. Ed. English version. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). P.89

<sup>102</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>103</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>104</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 51.

<sup>105</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P.43.

<sup>106</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P.43.

Bonhoeffer has with all of these concepts, is that they deny Christ's active presence.<sup>107</sup>

**'bargain-basement goods'<sup>108</sup> / 'grace as doctrine, as principle, as system'<sup>109</sup>**

Grace as doctrine, principle, and system,<sup>110</sup> is deemed to be of no worth to Bonhoeffer as it does not bring forth Christ's presence as a concrete reality in the world.<sup>111</sup> Instead, Bonhoeffer argued that abstract principles were a distortion of Luther's doctrine of 'law and gospel'; as Luther did not teach people to renounce good works in favour of faith alone.<sup>112</sup>

The phrase 'grace as doctrine, as principle, as system'<sup>113</sup> in correlation with the term 'bargain basement goods'<sup>114</sup> is a reaction to German Lutheranism of the 1930's, which was influenced by a radical development of Luther's doctrine of law and gospel as expounded by the nineteenth century Danish Lutherans.<sup>115</sup> They taught that good works were contrary to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and therefore, should be avoided.<sup>116</sup> Bonhoeffer wrote that the idea of grace as an abstract reality which did not need any concrete expression or good works was a distortion of Luther's doctrine of law and gospel;<sup>117</sup> and concluded that the Danish Lutherans (and those who were influenced by them) took Luther's insights

---

<sup>107</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>108</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>109</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>110</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>111</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 53.

<sup>112</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 53.

<sup>113</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>114</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>115</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Introduction to the English Edition.' P. 12.

<sup>116</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Introduction to the English Edition.' Pp. 277-278.

<sup>117</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 53.

and divorced them from the reality of his life of discipleship, so as to create an abstract idea of grace.

When Bonhoeffer writes; ‘They say if only our church is in possession of a doctrine of justification, then it is surely a justified church!’ he is arguing against these Lutherans who taught that a person achieves God’s righteousness by virtue of possessing and defending the principle, and not by the deeds which were commanded by Christ.<sup>118</sup> This idea conflicted with Bonhoeffer’s belief that Luther had come to have the insights he wrote about in the doctrine of ‘law and gospel’ after years of strict discipleship following Christ’s commands, which meant that Luther’s doctrines were principles with substance behind them.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, a radical anti-works theology is contrary to Luther’s teachings that good works are a natural consequence of faith;<sup>120</sup> and that being a Christian finds expression in conforming to Christ in obedience.<sup>121</sup>

As much as Bonhoeffer believed that theology which taught doctrines and abstract principles which did not encourage discipleship were of no worth, he similarly believed that the idea of universal forgiveness was ineffective. Bonhoeffer also argued that abstract truths and universal forgiveness were dangerous as they left people in their sinful existence;<sup>122</sup> I will speak more about universal forgiveness of sins in the next section.

---

<sup>118</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. ‘Editors’ Introduction to the English Edition.’ P. 11.

<sup>119</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 53.

<sup>120</sup> Martin Luther. ‘Concerning Christian Liberty.’ P. 345 & 346.

<sup>121</sup> Martin Luther. ‘Concerning Christian Liberty.’ P. 365.

<sup>122</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

**'cut-rate forgiveness'<sup>123</sup> / 'forgiveness of sins as a general truth'<sup>124</sup>**

Bonhoeffer believed that the forgiveness of sins without repentance was worthless, and deceptive. He wrote it was worthless, as it did not have the power to bring about reconciliation with God, and the transformation which is a natural effect of such an encounter;<sup>125</sup> and that it was deceptive because Bonhoeffer believed that it wrongly allowed Christians to think that they were having a profound relationship with God.<sup>126</sup>

In the address *Christ and Peace* which informed the material in *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer writes that the forgiveness of sins as a universal truth which does not lead to repentance is a misunderstanding of Luther's doctrine of law and gospel.<sup>127</sup> As I have mentioned in the first chapter, Luther maintained that the relationship between the law and gospel was such that the law exposed sin so that the Christian would seek out God; and by experiencing the forgiveness of God, come to know the benevolence of God's nature.<sup>128</sup> This exchange justifies sinners by taking them away from sins; whereas the idea of universal forgiveness leaves people in their sinful existence, as they do not have a reason to reconcile with God in repentance.

Moreover, Bonhoeffer taught that Christians who believe in forgiveness as a general truth are worse off than if they have no belief. He says this because he believes adhering to the idea of universal forgiveness, means Christians loose the

---

<sup>123</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>124</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>125</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

<sup>126</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Christ and Peace. As found in, Larry L. Rasmussen. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).P. 209.

<sup>127</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Christ and Peace.' P. 209

<sup>128</sup> Bernhard Lohse. *Martin Luther's Theology*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999) p. 179.

impetus to transform their lives; as general forgiveness of sins means the individual has no reason to take the commands of Christ seriously. This kind of existence Bonhoeffer sees as a dismissal of God's law, and in the process a dismissal of God as well.<sup>129</sup>

In conclusion: Bonhoeffer wrote that the forgiveness of sins as a general truth not only takes away the need for the reconciling activity of repentance, but it also deceives people into believing that God's law is unnecessary.<sup>130</sup> In other words it provides a source of superficial comfort for a Christian, but does not encourage true spiritual growth.<sup>131</sup>

**'cut-rate comfort'<sup>132</sup> / 'God's love as merely a Christian idea of God'<sup>133</sup>**

Like everything else in Bonhoeffer's theology, comfort is a product of action; in particular, active discipleship.<sup>134</sup> He warns against the notion of a universal idea of God which brings comfort without recognizing the commands of Christ, because he believes that it excludes a relationship with God, (as it is the kind of superficial comfort that people bestow on themselves). Bonhoeffer does not believe that this is true comfort and nor does it have the world changing implications of the comfort that comes with conforming to Christ, and acting for humanity.<sup>135</sup>

In his paper entitled *Concerning the Christian Idea of God*, Bonhoeffer outlines the correlation between faith and theological thinking. He agrees with

---

<sup>129</sup> "Christ and Peace" p. 209

<sup>130</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

<sup>131</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Christ and Peace' P. 209.

<sup>132</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43

<sup>133</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43

<sup>134</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 91.

<sup>135</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Concerning the Christian Idea of God' in, *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. 12. No. 2. (April. 1932) Published by the University of Chicago Press. P. 179.

Barth that thinking about God is a consequence of faith, but still has its limitations; and goes on to say that one of these limitations is the inability of thought to represent reality in a single statement. For example, Bonhoeffer wrote that the idea of a Christian God of love was not an accurate statement because it left out other aspects of God's character such as God's wrath.<sup>136</sup>

More importantly for Bonhoeffer, the idea of God in general statements leaves out the revelation of God's human reality in Jesus Christ; and the ever-presence of Christ within the church-community.<sup>137</sup> Bonhoeffer goes on to say that without faith in God, and assent to God's revelation in Christ, the Christian is not justified. He also makes it clear that justification does not come through ideas which are a product of the human mind and so exclude a divine relationship.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, when Bonhoeffer talks about Christian comfort and the exclusion of discipleship, he is also setting up the idea that true discipleship finds expression in suffering, and taking up one's cross.<sup>139</sup> For Bonhoeffer real comfort is taking on this suffering and coming closer to the truth and conforming to Christ.<sup>140</sup>

In reference to the church in Germany in the 1930's Bonhoeffer believed that the idea of God, without social justice, coupled with a distortion of Luther's doctrine of 'two kingdoms' created a church which sought comfort in the security of the backing of the state and its powerful ideology; rather than acknowledging that justification came about in demonstrable acts of discipleship, and the

---

<sup>136</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Concerning the Christian Idea of God' in, P. 179

<sup>137</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Concerning the Christian Idea of God.' P. 180.

<sup>138</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Concerning the Christian Idea of God.' P. 184

<sup>139</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>140</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 91.

suffering which that entailed.<sup>141</sup> In short, Bonhoeffer believed that the church acquiesced to the state, rather than imitating Christ in action.<sup>142</sup>

In Bonhoeffer's theology, a church which comforts itself with a universal idea about God but leaves out the need for discipleship merely confers the comfort of God on itself, without having a true relationship with God. This kind of church was not a church for others and did not experience the suffering and costs which come with discipleship, nor the comfort which comes with conforming to Christ in suffering, because it could not, among other things provide a critique of the state and the world.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, this church could only give empty sacraments, because of its distance from God.<sup>144</sup>

**'cut-rate sacrament; grace as the church's inexhaustible pantry, from which it is doled out by careless hands without hesitation or limit'<sup>145</sup> / 'The church that teaches this doctrine of grace thereby confers such grace upon itself'<sup>146</sup>**

Bonhoeffer believed that the church in Nazi Germany could not claim to be a sacramental entity; as it did not connect people to God and the reality of Christ's ministry. Bonhoeffer believed this because the church did not teach Christians how to act in the world; nor provide a critique of an oppressing government.<sup>147</sup> Instead, Bonhoeffer wrote that the churches of the time were going through the

---

<sup>141</sup> Peter Frick. *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation*. (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) p. 146-147.

<sup>142</sup> Peter Frick. *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation*. P. 147.

<sup>143</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 91.

<sup>144</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

<sup>145</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>146</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>147</sup> Clifford J. Green. 'Human Sociality and Christian Community' in, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Ed. John W. De Gruchy. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). P. 122.

self-serving motions, purely for the sake of comforting themselves.<sup>148</sup> In doing this Bonhoeffer believed that the church was deceiving members out of a true connection with God.

For Bonhoeffer sacrament is the enactment of the word of God which is both the proclamation of the word, and the expression of Jesus as the Logos.<sup>149</sup> The church as the place where the proclamation is heard must then realise that word by conforming to Christ's nature, or making Christ present in the world. This means that a sacramental church is responsible for acting against any injustice in society. Yet Bonhoeffer was convinced that the churches in Nazi Germany were accommodating the government rather than critiquing it; and carried on supplying the sacraments and reciting the creeds whilst denying Christ's command to follow him in neighbourly love.<sup>150</sup> He saw that nationalism had corrupted the church<sup>151</sup> and believed that nationalistic ideology had replaced spiritual values.<sup>152</sup>

This led Bonhoeffer to write that the churches of Germany gave out 'cut-rate sacraments,'<sup>153</sup> as they did not bring Christ forth into the world. Rather Bonhoeffer taught that the churches went through ritualistic motions which were for the benefit of comforting themselves. However, as they did not bring people into active discipleship, Bonhoeffer could not see any grace in the actions and taught that the church was bestowing empty grace upon itself, or rather not bestowing any grace on itself and deceiving parishioners into believing that they were receiving true sacraments.<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>148</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>149</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer *Gesammelte Schriften. Vol III*. Ed. Eberhardt Bethge. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1966) p. 187. as found in Clifford J. Green. *Bonhoeffer. A Theology of Sociality*. (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). P. 217.

<sup>150</sup> Clifford J. Green. 'Human Sociality and Christian Community.' P. 122.

<sup>151</sup> Clifford J. Green. 'Human Sociality and Christian Community.' P. 189.

<sup>152</sup> Vigen Guroian. 'Church and Nationhood: A Reflection on the 'National Church.'"P.181.

<sup>153</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>154</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.



Bonhoeffer believed that this theological environment had been created by a distortion of Luther's doctrine of law and gospel,<sup>155</sup> Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, and the cultural context. As I have already discussed, the idea of the all-sufficiency of faith meant for some Lutherans that the commands of Christ did not need to be acted out, and Luther's premise that the government was ordained by God provided a foil to any kind of opposing action.<sup>156</sup> In addition to these theological difficulties, there was also the idea of Germanism which was an inherent part of the national church; and provided a fertile breeding ground for patriotic fervour and distracted people from the gospel proclamation.<sup>157</sup>

Therefore, there were many factors contributing to making the church the way it was; however, Bonhoeffer stated that if the church did not point to God, and was therefore not sacramental, then Christ's suffering on the cross became unnecessary, as did Christ himself<sup>158</sup>.

**'It is grace without a price, without costs. It is said that the bill is paid for in advance for all time. Everything can be had for free, courtesy of that paid bill'<sup>159</sup> / 'Cheap grace is thus the denial of God's living word'<sup>160</sup>**

Bonhoeffer wrote that cheap grace was a denial of the truth of Christ's ministry which required obedience and suffering. He asserted that the idea of Christ's death on the cross being an atonement that absolved Christians of any kind of activity on behalf of the other was a cheap way to get around the reality of the call

---

<sup>155</sup> Jeffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Introduction to the English Edition'. P. 3.

<sup>156</sup> Ruth Zerner. 'Church, state and the "Jewish question."' P. 198.

<sup>157</sup> Jeffrey Pugh. *Religionless Christianity*. (New York: T&T Clark International, 2008). P. 76.

<sup>158</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>159</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43

<sup>160</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

to discipleship. Bonhoeffer believed that side-stepping discipleship required a high price from the church; because without the suffering of the cross, (which is experienced in discipleship) there could not be resurrection or new life. By denying this Bonhoeffer stated that the church was not living up to its responsibility to the other.<sup>161</sup>

Bonhoeffer wrote that a distortion of Luther's doctrine of law and gospel had arisen which decreed that the law was fulfilled by God's promise of the cross. When Luther said that '...the promises of God give what the commandments of God demand and fulfil what the law prescribes so that all things may be God's alone, both the commandments and the fulfilling of the commandments,'<sup>162</sup> Bonhoeffer interpreted it as Luther not meaning that Christians had no need to worry about obedience to commandments, but rather that all glory goes to God.<sup>163</sup> He backed up this claim with reference to Luther's own writing in notes for the Augsburg Confession where he speaks of the necessity of Christian suffering.<sup>164</sup>

Bonhoeffer argued that suffering was an important part of discipleship,<sup>165</sup> which could not be understood by Christians who lived separate lives as Christians from the way they did in their secular existence.<sup>166</sup> For Bonhoeffer there was no escape from being a Christian, and that a true Christian would not want to retreat from such a state; as being conformed to Christ in obedience was the means of coming closer to Christ.<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>161</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. Pp. 90-91.

<sup>162</sup> Martin Luther. 'Concerning Christian Liberty.' P. 349.

<sup>163</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 89.

<sup>164</sup> Martin Luther. 'Twelfth Schwabach Article, 1529' in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. (1930 ed.) as found in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*.

<sup>165</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 86.

<sup>166</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 87.

<sup>167</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 86.

Moreover, Bonhoeffer believed that the idea of suffering added more depth to the reconciling act of forgiveness than general ideas of forgiveness could provide. Bonhoeffer did not overlook the suffering which came with forgiveness; and he wrote in *Discipleship* that the Christian takes on the sin of other people through suffering, as Christ did, and in this way the Christian truly fulfils the law. Yet, Bonhoeffer also maintained that this suffering is ameliorated by the disciple's experience of the closeness of Christ in the act.<sup>168</sup>

In conclusion: Suffering for Bonhoeffer was a necessary part of discipleship, as it was necessary for Christ. A church which did not embrace Christ's suffering was not a church, as it was 'scandalized' by the cross, and therefore by God's actions.<sup>169</sup> What Bonhoeffer believed such a church missed, however, was that suffering which was attendant in Christ's act on the cross is the same suffering which appears in the reconciling act of forgiveness. He suggested that a church which did not act in community to reconcile its brothers and sisters to God through forgiveness, could only bring forth justification of sin, which divided people and kept them away from salvation<sup>170</sup>.

**'Cheap grace means justification of the sin but not the sinner'<sup>171</sup>**

Bonhoeffer's allegation that the church was justifying sins, rather than the sinner was a serious one. It meant that the church was not sharing in Christ's righteousness,<sup>172</sup> that Christians were being left in there sinful states,<sup>173</sup> and that the church became a purveyor of evil<sup>174</sup>.

---

<sup>168</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 88.

<sup>169</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 88.

<sup>170</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. Pp 88-91.

<sup>171</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Disciplehsip*. P. 43.

<sup>172</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*. P. 256.

<sup>173</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

<sup>174</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer writes that God is justified by God's own actions.<sup>175</sup> God does this through Christ's death on the cross; and it is only through our dying with Christ that we share in his justification.<sup>176</sup> The reason Christians are justified by Christ's passion is because Christ's act of atonement absorbs all of our deaths into his death in the flesh, and gives us new life. The disciple becomes justified by means of taking on Christ's body and sharing in that righteousness. Therefore, if the church avoids the cross, or deems it to be unnecessary, in Bonhoeffer's estimation it also throws away its own righteousness.<sup>177</sup>

Yet, another consequence of the justification of sin rather than the sinner is that the church becomes complicit in sins, and keeps people in their sinful lives.<sup>178</sup> This begs the question. When Bonhoeffer wonders whether cheap grace is the reason for the collapse of the church is Bonhoeffer really suggesting that the church in Nazi Germany was becoming a satanic presence, rather than the presence of Christ? The editors of the works edition of *Discipleship* certainly believe so, and write;

'Bonhoeffer's ire shaped the harsh rhetoric with which he described what he sensed was a lethal combat between the forces of Christ and those of Satan, between the kingdom of God and the world now become Satan's realm, between the Spirit who frees the human will for faith and the bondage of one's flesh to the appeal of a malevolent dictator'.<sup>179</sup>

## **Conclusion**

---

<sup>175</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 254.

<sup>176</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 256.

<sup>177</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 255.

<sup>178</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

<sup>179</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editor's Introduction to the English Edition.' P. 20.

In the introduction I mentioned that cheap grace is not only no grace, but that it is the enemy of the church.<sup>180</sup> In this summation I wish to outline the mechanics of how Bonhoeffer comes to this conclusion. His first explanatory comment on cheap grace is that it is a doctrine or principle.<sup>181</sup> Bonhoeffer was not against principles. His concern was that Lutherans had adopted a faith against work ethos and were not capable of entering into the obedience to God's call, and Christ's commandments.<sup>182</sup> Thereby, they were outside of a life of discipleship, and did not do the work of making Christ present in the world today. Similarly, when Bonhoeffer speaks of the forgiveness of sins as a general truth,<sup>183</sup> his main concern is that it excludes action and change. As with the idea of principles rather than action, Bonhoeffer believed ideas and principles were subjective and did not facilitate a relationship with God. However, this phrase is more damning for Bonhoeffer because it gives an implied permission to do wrong, as it justifies sin.<sup>184</sup>

The next two phrases, 'the Christian idea of God,'<sup>185</sup> and 'sins already forgiven,'<sup>186</sup> have the same concept of subjective faith, which does not require discipleship.<sup>187</sup> However, I believe it is nuanced to speak directly to the historical situation, because the national church failed to critique the Nazi government. Bonhoeffer, was especially confronting in his accusation that the church had become a place where guilty consciences were palliated without cure; and that this cycle engendered more sin in the world.<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>181</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>182</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>183</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>184</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Christ and Peace.' P. 209.

<sup>185</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>186</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>187</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Concerning the Christian Idea of God.' P. 179.

<sup>188</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

The natural consequence of these actions, which Bonhoeffer was speaking against, was that they kept the revelation of Christ out of the world; and by his definition denied Christ. Thereby, cheap grace is not grace, but rather the antithesis of real grace; and for Bonhoeffer the enemy of the church and the reason for the church's collapse.<sup>189</sup> In the next chapter I will examine costly grace, which Bonhoeffer believed could restore the troubled church.

## **Chapter Three: Costly Grace**

### ***Introduction***

For Bonhoeffer costly grace is a means for ensuring that Christ's presence is palpable in the world in the present day. What this means is that Christ is alive in the neighbourly love that Christians extend to each other and to the world; Christ is alive as the church-community, which mediates the word and sacrament; and that Christ is alive for humanity. There can be a tendency to clutch onto one aspect of Bonhoeffer's theology of costly grace, for example, social justice; however, this is akin to doing good works without faith. What Bonhoeffer is truly emphasising is the saving presence of Christ which is bigger than deeds, but at the same time is characterised by a ministry of uncompromising love.

Therefore, Bonhoeffer's theology has a cost component and a graced component. The cost component of following Christ means that Christians have to be obedient, suffer, and act redemptively in the world. The graced aspect means that Christians are told obedience and suffering bring them closer to God.<sup>190</sup>

In the previous chapter, I discussed Bonhoeffer's ironic interpretation of

---

<sup>189</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

<sup>190</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

grace; and mentioned that for Bonhoeffer grace was not doctrine, abstract principle, universal truths, self-justification, and a denial of Christ's concrete existence. In this chapter I will present Bonhoeffer's argument that costly grace is discipleship, and the living word of God.<sup>191</sup>

In order to examine Bonhoeffer's theology, I will be using a similar method to the second chapter and exploring each designation of costly grace individually. These sections will include Bonhoeffer's theology of Discipleship; The Sermon on the Mount; Kingdom of Heaven; Self-Denial; Justification of the Sinner; Judgement; Theology of the Cross; and the Theology of Incarnation.

### ***Defintion: Costly Grace***

As I have already written in the second chapter on cheap grace, costly grace is the proclamation of the gospel which calls people to, and finds expression in, discipleship.<sup>192</sup> That is, plainly put, Bonhoeffer's understanding of grace.<sup>193</sup> Yet, like cheap grace, costly grace is a single term which is composed of two aspects; cost, and grace. Bonhoeffer makes a distinction between the meaning of the cost and the grace when he states;

‘It is costly, because it calls to discipleship; it is grace, because it calls people to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly, because it costs people their lives; it is grace, because it thereby makes them live. It is costly, because it condemns sin; it is grace, because it justifies the sinner. Above all, grace is costly, because it was costly to God, because it costs God the life of God's Son...and because nothing can be cheap to us which is

---

<sup>191</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipelship*. P. 45.

<sup>192</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 22.

<sup>193</sup> Jonathan D. Sorum, ‘Cheap Grace, Costly Grace and Just Plain Grace: Bonhoeffer's Defense of Justification by Faith Alone.’ P. 4.

costly to God. Above all it is grace because the life of God's Son was not too costly for God to give in order to make us live.'<sup>194</sup>

As there is a lot of theological information contained in each of these statements, I will consider each pairing of inter-related concepts of cost and grace, one at a time.

## ***Discipleship***

**'It is costly, because it calls to discipleship; it is grace, because it calls people to follow *Jesus Christ*.'**<sup>195</sup>

Discipleship is the primary concern for Bonhoeffer in his treatise on cheap and costly grace.<sup>196</sup> As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Bonhoeffer interprets Luther's theology through the lens of Luther's life of discipleship; and determines that the correct interpretation of law and gospel, which takes Luther's devoted life into consideration, is oriented towards obedience, and discipleship.<sup>197</sup> The shape of obedience, for Bonhoeffer, is found in the Sermon on the Mount, and the way in which a person conforms to Christ through following Christ's commandments.<sup>198</sup> Yet, discipleship is more than obedience for Bonhoeffer, it also means coming into the truth, and experiencing the joy that fellowship with Christ brings.<sup>199</sup>

I have already mentioned Kierkegaard's influence on Bonhoeffer in the writing of *Discipleship* and nowhere is that more apparent than in Bonhoeffer's concept of discipleship. Bonhoeffer believed that Kierkegaard had correctly

---

<sup>194</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>195</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>196</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>197</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 50.

<sup>198</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 181.

<sup>199</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 62.



interpreted Luther's doctrine of law and grace in his arguments against the Danish Lutherans who I have mentioned, adopted a radical anti-works theology.<sup>200</sup> Kierkegaard argued, and Bonhoeffer agreed that the 'dialectic' or element of discussion had been removed from Luther's teachings to create a distorted conception of faith and law which lost sight of the context of Luther's doctrine;<sup>201</sup> and of Luther's own life of discipleship.<sup>202</sup>

The correct interpretation of law and gospel for Bonhoeffer made no distinction between faith and obedience; but rather had an absolute commitment to following Christ.<sup>203</sup> Bonhoeffer wrote that anything less than a total commitment was not only inadequate but a denial of the living word.<sup>204</sup> Bonhoeffer's reason for this uncompromising allegiance to Christ in discipleship is connected to his interpretation of Christ's commandments on the Sermon of the Mount; which he believes are the actions that Christ requires from believers in the world.<sup>205</sup> Bonhoeffer even goes so far as to assert that faith which does not translate into action is unbelief.<sup>206</sup> This is distinct from Luther's interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount which saw the commandments as representing an unattainable ideal which serve to remind people of their sinfulness.<sup>207</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly. 'The Influence of Kierkegaard on Bonhoeffer's Concept of Discipleship' in, *Irish Theological Quarterly*. June 1974 vol. 41. no. 2. PP. 148-154.

<sup>201</sup> Soren Kierkegaard. *The Journals of Kierkegaard. 1834-1854*. Ed. and trans. Alexander Dru (London: Fontana, 1967) P. 166. as found in Geoffrey B. Kelly. 'The Influence of Kierkegaard on Bonhoeffer's Concept of Discipleship.'

<sup>202</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 50.

<sup>203</sup> Clifford J. Green. 'Editor's Introduction to the English Edition,' in, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York 1928-1931*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 10. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). P. 35.

<sup>204</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity.' P. 348.

<sup>205</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Letter '193. To Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer' in, *London 1933-1935*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). P. 285.

<sup>206</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. '1933-1934 Annual Report of the German Evangelical Church of Sydenham, London.' P. 301.

<sup>207</sup> Erich von Dietze. "When are you returning to the real ministry?' Dietrich Bonhoeffer's continuing legacy of influence and inspiration.' Unpublished work. P. 8.

With this in mind it is clear to see the cost element of discipleship is the difficulty of obedience. In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer makes a strong connection between faith and obedience to the commandments of the Sermon on the Mount<sup>208</sup> which conform a Christian to Christ as the Lord;<sup>209</sup> even to the point at which Christians must give up all of their worldly possessions,<sup>210</sup> and accept suffering and persecution.<sup>211</sup>

The grace element of discipleship is experienced in following Jesus Christ.<sup>212</sup> Grace is two-pronged in this respect: First, it reconciles people to the truth, for example; ‘Only those bound to Jesus in discipleship stand in complete truthfulness;’<sup>213</sup> and Second, it lessens the difficulties which are a part of discipleship, as Christ says; ‘My yoke is easy, and my burden is light’ (Matt. 11:30).<sup>214</sup>

When Jesus draws people to the truth which is encountered in him, there is a change which occurs in the life of the believer. Bonhoeffer explains this change as the death of the old self, where a new life in Christ emerges.<sup>215</sup> Being in the truth a disciple realises that although the demands of following Christ’s commandments result in loss, suffering, and persecution,<sup>216</sup> the joy of being in fellowship with Christ is far greater.<sup>217</sup> There is no *deus ex machina* in Bonhoeffer’s theology;<sup>218</sup> the relief of the suffering the Christian experiences is

---

<sup>208</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 181.

<sup>209</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 59.

<sup>210</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 46.

<sup>211</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 87.

<sup>212</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>213</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 131.

<sup>214</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>215</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 62.

<sup>216</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 37.

<sup>217</sup> Haddon Wilmer. ‘Costly Discipleship.’ P. 178.

<sup>218</sup> Peter Selby. ‘Christianity in a World Come of Age.’ P. 237.

not from having the pain removed, but by being close to the reality of Christ in the suffering for humankind.<sup>219</sup>

In conclusion: Bonhoeffer saw the cost aspect of discipleship as obedience to Christ's commands to the point of suffering, loss, and persecution. Yet, the grace which comes with faith is related as the process of coming closer to God. In the next section I will explore in more depth Bonhoeffer's argument that the commandments of the Sermon on the Mount were to be obeyed in the here-and-now. This aspect of Bonhoeffer's theology was influenced by Kierkegaard's exposition on the commandments,<sup>220</sup> and his time spent at Union Theological Seminary, and in particular, in his friendship with the pacifist Jean Lasserre.<sup>221</sup> Both Kierkegaard and Lasserre viewed the commandments as enjoinders to be obeyed.

### ***Obedience/The Sermon on the Mount***

Bonhoeffer believed that the commandments on the Sermon on the Mount were a strict call to action and hence discipleship in Christ.<sup>222</sup> The primary motivation behind writing 'Costly Grace' and his treatise on the Sermon on the Mount, was Bonhoeffer's concern that Christians were evading their responsibility<sup>223</sup> by not obeying the commandments in their secular lives.<sup>224</sup> Yet, Bonhoeffer's theology of the Sermon on the Mount was about so much more than obedience. It was also a treatise on the ontological structure of discipleship and the church. In particular it focused on the extraordinariness and hiddenness of the disciple, and the

---

<sup>219</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 87.

<sup>220</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Introduction to the English Edition.' P. 8.

<sup>221</sup> Eberhard Bethge. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A Biography*. Pp. 153-154.

<sup>222</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 57.

<sup>223</sup> Eberhard Bethge. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A Biography*. P. 458.

<sup>224</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Introduction to the English Edition.' P. 5.

extraordinariness and visibility of the church.<sup>225</sup> Connected to this idea of the hiddenness of the disciple is the idea of self-denial and suffering which punctuates all of Bonhoeffer's writings on discipleship.<sup>226</sup>

The point of change in Bonhoeffer's theology of the Sermon on the Mount appeared in his period in London from 1933-1935, when he was writing some of the material which would be found in *Discipleship*. At this time he wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr that he was interested in creating a new way of looking at the Sermon on the Mount, 'It is high time to bring the focus back to the Sermon on the Mount, to some degree on the basis of a restoration of the Reformation theology, but in a way different from the Reformation understanding.'<sup>227</sup> This difference as I have already mentioned is in Bonhoeffer's belief that the commands were to be addressed as though they were being spoken in the present.

Bonhoeffer's writing on the Sermon on the Mount focuses on two aspects of discipleship; the extraordinariness of the disciple (caused by the extraordinariness of the commands which supersede the laws of the Old Testament) and the hiddenness of the disciple (as the only visibility in following the commands is through Christ; they are not intended to bring about personal glory in the disciple). Both of these elements serve to separate the Christian community from the rest of the world.<sup>228</sup> However, although the church-community is separate, it is still visible as a light shines forth from it;<sup>229</sup> and it is this ecclesiology which is the real focus of Bonhoeffer's Sermon on the Mount.

In a letter written to Erwin Sutz in May 1934, Bonhoeffer writes that he believes the answer to the church struggle is that the Sermon of the Mount is acted

---

<sup>225</sup> Haddon Willmer. 'Costly Discipleship.' P. 180.

<sup>226</sup> Jeffrey C. Pugh. *Religionless Christianity*. P. 176.

<sup>227</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Letter '127 Reinhold Niebuhr.'

<sup>228</sup> Haddon Willmer. 'Costly Discipleship.' P. 180.

<sup>229</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 112.

out to the point of suffering.<sup>230</sup> This emphasis on suffering, which Bonhoeffer derived from Luther, begins his treatise on the Sermon on the Mount and intersects with Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross. Bonhoeffer maintains that the outcome of the Sermon on the Mount is for the disciples to suffer as Christ suffered; and that the community of disciples as the church body must suffer, as a result of Christ's same suffering.<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, Bonhoeffer draws us to his focus on the community and the new humanity which is brought in by Christ's suffering when he remarks; 'The cross comes into view. Christ, the disciples, the people - one can already see the whole history of the suffering of Jesus and his community.'<sup>232</sup>

A month later in a letter which has been preserved from Hardy Arnold to Edith Boker discussing Bonhoeffer's intentions, we find that Bonhoeffer had decided to create an order based solely on the Sermon of the Mount (and we can assume that Finkenwalde was an extension of this same thinking). Interestingly, Hardy Arnold had already noticed the lack of Pneumatology in Bonhoeffer's theology,<sup>233</sup> and this seems to be the persistent criticism of Bonhoeffer's work, which I will consider in depth in the next chapter.

Obedience to the commands of Christ is a central concern in Bonhoeffer's treatise on cheap/costly grace.<sup>234</sup> This mode of operating is what is otherwise spoken of as discipleship; and as I will show in the next section, the outcome, or the goal of discipleship is to bring in the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. '93. Letter to Erwin Sutz.' P. 135.

<sup>231</sup> Jeffrey C. Pugh. *Religionless Christianity*. P. 176.

<sup>232</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 101.

<sup>233</sup> Hardy Arnold. '114b. Hardy Arnold to Edith Boker' in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.' P. 162.

<sup>234</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>235</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity.' P. 343.

## ***Kingdom of Heaven***

Bonhoeffer was uncompromising in his theology of discipleship. A Christian was either obedient, doing God's work, and looking forward to salvation, or disobedient, complicit in sin, and headed for destruction. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his theology of the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>236</sup> For Bonhoeffer, the upshot of obedience was that the Kingdom of God became a present day and eschatological reality.<sup>237</sup> Disobedience on the other hand was for Bonhoeffer, the cause of the church struggle, and possibly the demise of the church as he knew it.<sup>238</sup>

For Bonhoeffer there is either obedience or disobedience.<sup>239</sup> Obedience to Christ in discipleship ensures the presence of the body of Christ in the world, whereas disobedience means that Christ's presence is liable to disappear.<sup>240</sup> Like Bonhoeffer's Christology which was very much of this world, Bonhoeffer did believe that the kingdom of God was a present reality created through obedience;<sup>241</sup> however, he also maintained that those who stayed in disobedience were headed for eternal destruction.<sup>242</sup> In this case it would be natural to assume, Bonhoeffer was referring to the German Christians.

The theme of the kingdom of Heaven is explored in 'Costly Grace' with Bonhoeffer's references to various quotes from Matthew.<sup>243</sup> All of these quotes point to the essential message of obedience to Christ, the backbone of

---

<sup>236</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 77.

<sup>237</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity,' P. 343.

<sup>238</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Afterword to the German edition.' P. 298.

<sup>239</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 77.

<sup>240</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 53.

<sup>241</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity.' P. 343.

<sup>242</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Afterword to the German Edition.' P. 298.

<sup>243</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. Pp. 44-45.

Bonhoeffer's theology.<sup>244</sup> The first quote is; 'Again the kingdom of Heaven is the hidden treasure in the field, for the sake of which people go and sell with joy everything that they have.' (Matt. 13:44) However, Bonhoeffer substitutes the term 'costly grace' for the phrase 'kingdom of Heaven'. Similarly he does so in the next Matthean phrase; '[costly grace] is the costly pearl, for whose price the merchant sells all that he has'. (Matt. 13:45f).<sup>245</sup> As I have already mentioned Bonhoeffer is known for being purposeful with his use of words,<sup>246</sup> so it is necessary to investigate the substitution of 'costly grace' for 'kingdom of Heaven.'

Eberhard Bethge writes that the emphasis of Bonhoeffer's thought at the time of writing *Discipleship* was eschatological;<sup>247</sup> this is confirmed in a sermon on Wisdom 3:3 which was written in London in 1933, it reads; 'No one has yet believed in God and the kingdom of Heaven, no one has yet heard about the realm of the resurrected, and not been homesick from that hour, waiting and looking forward joyfully to being released from bodily existence.'<sup>248</sup> Yet, it would be hard to believe that this was all Bonhoeffer meant by the kingdom of Heaven, given his Christology that was very much oriented upon the present.<sup>249</sup>

It is possible that Bonhoeffer was resistant to talk too much about the idea of the kingdom of God as a present reality, because the German Christians spoke of building the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>250</sup> In 1930 in the years leading into the foundation of the German Christians, we see Bonhoeffer's opposition to this line

---

<sup>244</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editor's Introduction to the English Edition.' P. 1.

<sup>245</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. Pp. 44-45.

<sup>246</sup> Frits De Lange. *Waiting for the Word*. P. 95.

<sup>247</sup> Eberhard Bethge. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A Biography*. P. 87.

<sup>248</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Sermon on Wisdom 3:3. London, November 26, 1933.' P. 334.

<sup>249</sup> Andrea Pangritz. 'Who is Jesus for us Today'. P. 136.

<sup>250</sup> Bergen L. Doris. *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996).

of thought when he remarks; ‘...we felt too much satisfaction with our scientific, economic, and social progress and we identified this progress with the coming of the Kingdom of God’.<sup>251</sup>

It is also possible that Bonhoeffer substituted the words, costly grace, as a corrective term, to imply it is not the kingdom of God as the grace we bestow on ourselves which is the hidden treasure, but rather a graced community of discipleship. This has credence when we consider an exposition he wrote on Christianity in the same period as the previous statement, and only a few years before writing *Discipleship*. In it he writes that Jesus maintained that the kingdom of Heaven was

among the disciples, and that Christ brought in the new age.<sup>252</sup> Therefore, Bonhoeffer does agree with the German Christians that the kingdom of Heaven is a present reality, however, Bonhoeffer stresses that it is a spiritual reality in this world rather than a secular achievement. Yet, Bonhoeffer also believes in the kingdom of Heaven as an eschatological reality which brings us closer to God’s judgement.<sup>253</sup>

In reference to the first few quotes of Matthew, Bonhoeffer writes, ‘God’s lordship requires everything or nothing’<sup>254</sup> and ‘Before God’s will, there is no consideration of human matters’.<sup>255</sup> Both of these statements confirm the totality of discipleship that Bonhoeffer’s theology requires. They also share a prominent theme throughout Bonhoeffer’s work that we are either with God (in a total commitment) or we are against God.<sup>256</sup> This idea is suggested earlier, in *Act and*

---

<sup>251</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. ‘Sermon on 1 John 4:16. New York, November 9, 1930.’ P. 582.

<sup>252</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. ‘Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity.’ P. 343.

<sup>253</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. ‘Sermon on Wisdom 3:3. London, November 26, 1933.’ P. 334.

<sup>254</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. ‘Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity.’ P. 348.

<sup>255</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. ‘Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity.’ P. 348.

<sup>256</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. ‘Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity.’ P. 348.



*Being*, where Bonhoeffer remarks that human beings are either ‘in Christ’ or ‘in Adam’;<sup>257</sup> or in other words either in salvation, or heading for destruction. It is echoed in *Discipleship* in the chapter on *The Sermon on the Mount* as well.<sup>258</sup> There Bonhoeffer writes that the significance of Christ’s commands are such that they are to be obeyed;<sup>259</sup> and that the church community which follows Christ in action will remain intact, whereas a church-community which pontificates over Christ’s words without action will disappear.<sup>260</sup>

In the three parables on the kingdom of Heaven in Matthew (Matt. 13:44-50), from which Bonhoeffer takes these quotes, there is a final phrase which is alluded to but not mentioned; it reads, ‘The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matt 13:50). I do not believe it is a deliberate omission, as it echoes other statements Bonhoeffer has made including; ‘all those who knowingly separate themselves from the Confessing Church in Germany separate themselves from salvation;’<sup>261</sup> and in *Discipleship*, ‘The call of Jesus Christ means being the salt of the earth or being destroyed.’<sup>262</sup> I believe Bonhoeffer was trying to demonstrate that obedience which is expressed in discipleship in the present leads to salvation by conforming completely to Christ; and anything less than this will lead to destruction in the present, (which was being played out around him in the world at war) and as such will end in eternal oblivion.

---

<sup>257</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Act and Being*. P. 134.

<sup>258</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. Pp. 100-182.

<sup>259</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 181.

<sup>260</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 182.

<sup>261</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Way to Freedom. Letters, Lectures and Notes, 1935-1939*. Ed. Edwin H. Robertson. (London: Harper, 196P. 298.

<sup>262</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 112.

The kingdom of Heaven was a present and eschatological reality for Bonhoeffer, which signalled the salvation or destruction of a Christian. Obedience and discipleship were not just a matter of following orders; there was also an ontological change which took place in the disciple.<sup>263</sup> With discipleship came self-denial, or rather the death of the self, or the flesh, and a new life in Christ.<sup>264</sup> This new life was more than just an individual change, however, it also signalled a new humanity being brought forth.<sup>265</sup>

### ***Self-Denial***

**'It is costly, because it costs people their lives; it is grace, because it thereby makes them live.'**<sup>266</sup>

Self-denial is a big part of Bonhoeffer's theology of discipleship. As I have already stated in the previous section, Bonhoeffer was frank in stating that a person was either obedient and with Christ or disobedient and facing destruction. Self-denial is the next step for a Christian who is ready to conform to Christ and take on all that it entails, including suffering and possible death.<sup>267</sup> Yet at the same time, because of grace, disciples find that the more they die to themselves, the more they experience new life and living in the truth of Christ.<sup>268</sup>

Debate has arisen over the statement that '[costly grace] is costly, because it costs people their lives,'<sup>269</sup> Craig Slane remarks that it conjures up ideas of

---

<sup>263</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Act and Being*. P. 134.

<sup>264</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>265</sup> Clifford J. Green. 'Editor's Introduction' in, *Sanctorum Communio*. P. 3.

<sup>266</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>267</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 87.

<sup>268</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>269</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

Finkenwalde as being a preparation for martyrdom.<sup>270</sup> I believe that Bonhoeffer does not discount the possibility of disciples having to give their lives in martyrdom;<sup>271</sup> however that is not what Bonhoeffer is referring to when he speaks of self-denial.<sup>272</sup> Rather, Bonhoeffer is following Kierkegaard's premise that annihilation of the self, denigration of the ego, is necessary for a person to come to know God.<sup>273</sup> In coming to know God a person encounters grace.<sup>274</sup>

Willmer too, writes that the emphasis on martyrdom is an incorrect interpretation of Bonhoeffer's statement that costly grace costs people their lives.<sup>275</sup> He says that the statement refers to the death of self which comes with following Jesus.<sup>276</sup> I believe Willmer's ideas seem more in line with a sermon Bonhoeffer gave in London which is contemporaneous with the writing of *Discipleship*. In it Bonhoeffer writes that a person who seeks martyrdom for self-interest, but denies love, may in fact, sacrifice his or her life, but still encounter God's judgement, as they have missed conforming to Christ in only serving their own interests.<sup>277</sup> This line of thought carries over into *Discipleship* where Bonhoeffer writes, 'Self-denial can never result in...self-martyrdom...It does not mean suicide, because even suicide can be the expression of the human person's own will. Self-denial means knowing only Christ, no longer knowing oneself...only him who is going ahead...and taking up... their cross',<sup>278</sup> and 'Discipleship without Jesus Christ is choosing one's own path. It could be an ideal

---

<sup>270</sup> Craig Slane. *Bonhoeffer as Martyr: Social Responsibility and Modern Christian Commitment*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004). P. 227.

<sup>271</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 87.

<sup>272</sup> Sabine Dramm. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. An Introduction to his Thought*. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007). P. 27.

<sup>273</sup> David Jay Gouwens. *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). P. 112.

<sup>274</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>275</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>276</sup> Haddon Willmer. 'Costly Discipleship.' P. 176.

<sup>277</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. '14 Sermon on 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.' P. 381.

<sup>278</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 86.

path or a martyr's path, but it is without the promise. Jesus will reject it'.<sup>279</sup> The distinction 'their cross' is important as it indicates every follower of Christ has his or her own cross to take up, which Bonhoeffer writes, has been carefully planned by God.<sup>280</sup>

Moreover, the late Bishop of Chichester, Bell wrote in the Foreword of *The Cost of Discipleship* that Bonhoeffer was a martyr more than once in his life; as he witnessed to the truth of God without fear.<sup>281</sup> The cost in this concept of self-denial is loosing our life to this world, yet the grace element in this idea is that we begin to live through the sacrifice.<sup>282</sup> In other words, although we perceive the cost to be a hardship, this same 'cost,' if it is oriented to Christ, is a joy and the means of our salvation.<sup>283</sup> The reason for a Christians' joy is that they realise the truth of their existence which is at one with God. Bonhoeffer suggests everything in a person's life that feels right, is in orienting themselves to this truth. Conversely if we draw away from God, Bonhoeffer remarks that we are liable to experience God's anger;<sup>284</sup> so there is the joy of coming closer to God, coupled with the knowledge of avoiding God's wrath.

Bonhoeffer's statement that costly grace makes Christians lose their lives and gain their lives<sup>285</sup> is a reference to the need for a follower of Christ to come to know Christ completely, or conform absolutely to Christ's being.<sup>286</sup> This coming to know Christ is achieved in self-denial, which may sound undesirable; however,

---

<sup>279</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Disciplehsip*. P. 59.

<sup>280</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 87.

<sup>281</sup> G. K. A. Bell. 'Foreword' in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. (London: SCM Press, 1959). P. 7.

<sup>282</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 87.

<sup>283</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 112.

<sup>284</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. '21. Catechesis in the Second Theological Examination on the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, Berlin, June 29, 1930,' P. 564.

<sup>285</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>286</sup> Haddon Willmer. 'Costly Grace.' P. 176.

as it is a coming into grace, and into the truth. It is everything that human beings and humanity is oriented to.<sup>287</sup>

This idea of dying to self is very much a part of the next section on the justification of the sinner. Bonhoeffer believed that a sinner could only be separated from sin by a death to sin, which took place in the Christian community because of the believer's communion with Christ. This is through Christ's atoning death, and because of the reconciling act of forgiveness which Christians offer each other.<sup>288</sup>

## **Justification of the Sinner**

**'It is costly because it condemns sin, it is grace, because it justifies the sinner.'**<sup>289</sup>

I have already mentioned in the first chapter that Bonhoeffer believed that cheap grace justified sin and condemned the sinner; because it did not point to Christ's atoning death, and to the need for a Christian to conform to Christ in obedience. Therefore, when Bonhoeffer is speaking of the sinner being justified he is speaking of the opposite idea in which a Christian is justified through the adoption of Christ's justification, and a Christian's sins no longer have any power over the Christian as he or she possesses God's justification in Christ's act of atonement.<sup>290</sup> This movement away from sin begins in Baptism when a Christians dies to themselves, and the believer is kept in this state by the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in bringing forth sanctification.<sup>291</sup>

---

<sup>287</sup> Clifford J. Green. 'Editor's Introduction.' P. 3.

<sup>288</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*, P. 209.

<sup>289</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>290</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 209.

<sup>291</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 263.

In Bonhoeffer's treatise on Baptism he remarks that the death which the Christian experiences by virtue of Baptism moves Christians away from sin, or as he says, '[Christian's experience] justification away from sin'.<sup>292</sup> The cost element in this process is the condemnation of sins which is washed over by grace; so that the sinner is justified and removed from the harm of sin.

This justification takes place due to the sinner's communion with the body of Christ and with the death that the whole community experiences together with Christ's death. This is why the theology of the cross is so important for Bonhoeffer. It is by Christ's death, and the Christian's adoption of Christ's death that not only are sins condemned but the Christian is justified at the same time.<sup>293</sup> This means of justification is in stark contrast to the idea of universal forgiveness of 'cheap grace' that, Bonhoeffer remarks, does not require the death of the sinner or the cross of Christ.<sup>294</sup> Moreover, for Bonhoeffer the idea of justification of the sinner through the cross is related to God's act of self-justification that we share in, rather than our own self-justification.<sup>295</sup>

This means of sharing in justification and the ongoing sanctification that Bonhoeffer speaks of the Holy Spirit bringing in, causes the believer to become holy and to live in the community of the saints. Yet, Bonhoeffer points out that saints are still sinners, but by virtue of the holiness they attain through committing themselves to Christ in obedience, sin no longer has any power over them. That is why Bonhoeffer states that Christians can be called saints and not sinners. He writes; 'Christians must no longer be called "sinners," provided sinners are

---

<sup>292</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 209.

<sup>293</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 209.

<sup>294</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Introduction to the English Edition.' P. 5.

<sup>295</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 256.

understood as those who live subject to the power of sin...But now they are saints for the sake of Christ'.<sup>296</sup>

Not only are sinners freed from their sins through justification; there is also a distinct eschatological emphasis for Bonhoeffer, who says that by justification or sanctification, the community of saints, are those who are justified and preserved until the time of God's judgement.<sup>297</sup> In *Discipleship* he states; 'Those who have faith are being justified; those who are justified are being sanctified; those who are being sanctified are being saved on judgement day'.<sup>298</sup>

### ***Judgement / Theology of the Cross / Theology of Incarnation***

**'Above all, grace is costly, because it was costly to God, because it costs God the life of God's Son - "you were bought with a price" and because nothing can be cheap to us which is costly to God. Above all, it is grace because the life of God's Son was not too costly for God to give in order to make us live. Costly grace is the incarnation of God.'**<sup>299</sup>

This quote is multi-faceted, it brings up themes of judgement, (in the quote, "you were bought with a price"),<sup>300</sup> the theology of the cross in reference to God's Son giving up his life, and the incarnation, as is plainly stated.<sup>301</sup> I will examine all three of these aspects individually as they are significant to Bonhoeffer's theology.

---

<sup>296</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 263.

<sup>297</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 259.

<sup>298</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 280.

<sup>299</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>300</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>301</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 43.

## ***Judgement***

When Bonhoeffer speaks of judgement, he paradoxically speaks of the loving judgement of God;<sup>302</sup> and at the same time the day of judgement where people will be sorted due to their belief or unbelief.<sup>303</sup> This identification of faith as the determining factor is important in Bonhoeffer's theology of judgement, as salvation only comes through our identification with the righteousness of God. His main argument against universal forgiveness is that it does away with the need for Christ; whereas repentance and confession are constantly reconciling a person to God.<sup>304</sup>

Judgement for Bonhoeffer is a necessary element in reconciliation with Christ and discipleship. For Bonhoeffer, the mercy which comes with the judgement of God can only come through acts of repentance and searching inventories of conscience;<sup>305</sup> otherwise Bonhoeffer states that a Christian is just going through the motions of performing religious rituals and cannot benefit from the transformation which comes with sincere repentance and the attendant meeting with mercy.<sup>306</sup>

Effective repentance only comes about for Bonhoeffer in personal confession.<sup>307</sup> That is the place where we truly search ourselves and reach out to God in humility; rather than in general confessions. Bonhoeffer believed that in the general confession people say the words without giving much thought to their

---

<sup>302</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. '12. Sermon on Luke 13:1-5. London, Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 8, 1934.' P. 369.

<sup>303</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 57.

<sup>304</sup> L. Gregory Jones. 'The Cost of Forgiveness.' P. 151.

<sup>305</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. '12. Sermon on Luke 13:1-5. London, Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 8, 1934.' P. 370.

<sup>306</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 44.

<sup>307</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 277.



meaning and without personal engagement with the prayers.<sup>308</sup> In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer even goes so far as to say that costly grace comes to us through the act of confession.<sup>309</sup>

The quote from 1 Corinthians, ‘you were bought with a price’<sup>310</sup> is contained in a larger section of 1 Corinthians where Paul castigates the congregation of Corinth for not understanding that they are individuals who belong to the body of Christ. Paul then goes on to say, that as such, they must protect themselves from sin, lest they pollute the same body that they all share (1 Cor. 6-7). The phrase in question, ‘you were bought for a price’ (1 Cor. 6:20) alludes to the language used to speak of slavery, and Barton suggests that Paul used it deliberately to indicate that Christians belong to God, and are responsible for behaving as such through maintaining their righteousness.<sup>311</sup>

Yet, although Bonhoeffer is interested in personal salvation in *Discipleship*, his main focus is the life of the church, and Christ bringing in a new humanity. In a sermon Bonhoeffer delivered in London he shared this idea when he said;

‘...only through repentance can the world be renewed...Does it make anything better? Yes, it does; it makes *everything* better. How so? Because through our repentance, God’s grace can find its way back to us; because in our repentance no human being can be in the right, but rather God alone

---

<sup>308</sup> L. Gregory Jones. ‘The Cost of Forgiveness.’ P. 151.

<sup>309</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 271.

<sup>310</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>311</sup> Stephen C. Barton ‘1 Corinthians’ in, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Eds. James D. G. Dunn & John W. Rogerson. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003). P. 1327.

is right in all God's ways, whether in making us know fear or in showing us mercy.'<sup>312</sup>

However, it must be said that when Bonhoeffer speaks of God's mercy,<sup>313</sup> there is the profound sense of condemnation and damnation that can be found in his work. Here the condemnation is alluded to, in his choice of the phrase in Corinthians concerning the church aligning itself with a prostitute (1 Cor 6;16). The theme of damnation is more explicit, such as his statement in 1936, that '...all who knowingly cut themselves off from the community of the Confessing Church have in the situation of Nazi Germany, cut themselves off from salvation.'<sup>314</sup> There is a natural tendency to say that this is perfectly reasonable given Bonhoeffer's life setting, however, it is also necessary to say that it conflicts with Bonhoeffer's belief in all-encompassing love and forgiveness.

In conclusion: Bonhoeffer believes that repentance brings a Christian face-to-face with God's judgement which is merciful, and therefore it is a graced encounter. Yet, the ultimate means of reconciling with God, for Bonhoeffer, was the theology of the cross. By taking on the suffering and burden with Christ, Christians stand with Christ as one.<sup>315</sup>

### ***Theology of the Cross***

The cross is God's revelation *par excellence* for Bonhoeffer. It is both extraordinary and visible, and at the same time hidden.<sup>316</sup> It could even be said that all of the threads in *Costly Grace* converge on the cross. For example;

---

<sup>312</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. '12. Sermon on Luke 13:1-5. London, Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 8, 1934.' P. 370.

<sup>313</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. '2. Sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:10. London, Repentance Day 19, 1933.' P. 329.

<sup>314</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'The Question About the Community of the Church.' P. 83.

<sup>315</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 277.

<sup>316</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 114.

discipleship means taking up ones cross, dying to oneself, and being justified by the cross; and it could plausibly be proposed that the emphasis on the cross is a by-product of Bonhoeffer's radical Christology.

The cross is a burden for Christians, and involves suffering, yet the grace of God makes the burden not only light, but for Bonhoeffer a great comfort because the suffering allows Christians to know that they are perfectly conformed to Christ and living in the truth.<sup>317</sup> In this way, the Sermon on the Mount and the Theology of the Cross are closely connected.<sup>318</sup> For Bonhoeffer the Sermon on the Mount calls Christians to action which might cause suffering, and be considered a cost.<sup>319</sup> The Christian not only accepts this call because Jesus is the person making the command, but also because in conforming to Christ in discipleship Christians take on the suffering of Christ. They do so because Christ renounces violence and takes the burden of suffering upon himself.<sup>320</sup>

Moreover, Bonhoeffer states that Christians find comfort in the cross as they know that they stand in solidarity with Christ who suffered in the same way that they are asked to suffer. For example, Bonhoeffer writes; 'As bearers of suffering, they stand in communion with the Crucified. They stand as strangers in the power of him who was so alien to the world that it crucified him. This is their comfort, or rather he is their comfort...This alien community is comforted by the cross.'<sup>321</sup> This alien community, or rather the church-community is also identified by its allegiance to the cross; with Bonhoeffer stating, any 'church' that

---

<sup>317</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>318</sup> Jeffrey C. Pugh. *Religionless Christianity*. P. 106.

<sup>319</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Letter. '93. To Erwin Sutz. London, April 28, 1934.' P. 135.

<sup>320</sup> Jeffrey C. Pugh. *Religionless Christianity*. P. 106.

<sup>321</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 104.

scandalizes the cross is not the body of Christ.<sup>322</sup> This is a clear reference to the Ebionite heresy.<sup>323</sup>

Yet, Christ crucified is not only a comfort for persecuted Christians, it is in this very vulnerability that Bonhoeffer maintains the truth of God's strength can be found.<sup>324</sup> Christ not only takes on suffering, but Christ suffers for the sake of reconciling the world to God, and bearing the burden of the sins of everybody, thus affording Christians divine strength and consolation. As followers of Christ, disciples too take on the sins and guilt of those they forgive.<sup>325</sup> This idea of reconciling activity and looking after each other is expressed in Bonhoeffer's notion of 'vicarious representative action' whereby members of the community take the neediness of their enemies up to God in intercessory prayer and through love and forgiveness. In this way our enemies are not only unable to hurt us, as we take on their burdens as our own hurt; but this activity also brings us closer to God as we act as the reconciling agent.<sup>326</sup> Likewise when a person suffers as a vicarious agent of God, they suffer for the entire body of Christ.<sup>327</sup>

Suffering in the name of Christ is therefore an act of grace, as it brings a Christian closer to God, and through grace the Christian is able to reconcile others to God also.<sup>328</sup>

---

<sup>322</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. '17. Sermon on 1 Corinthians 13:13. London, Reformation Sunday, November 4, 1934.' P. 396.

<sup>323</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Christology' in, *Berlin 1932-1933*. Ed. English edition. Larry L. Rasmussen. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009. P. 338.

<sup>324</sup> Geoffrey Kelly. 'Bonhoeffer and Romero.' P. 100.

<sup>325</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 88.

<sup>326</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 140.

<sup>327</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 222.

<sup>328</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 89.

## ***Theology of the Incarnation***

The theology of the incarnation encompasses the theology of the cross, yet it reveals more than the cross. Most importantly it starts with the ontology of Christ which is *pro-me* and all humanity. It also states the way Christ is for me in the present world as a concrete reality through the church, in Word and sacrament.<sup>329</sup> Therefore Christ is a visible presence in the world as the church-community, which is called to share grace with its neighbours.<sup>330</sup>

Bonhoeffer's theology of incarnation is a part of his Christology which is *pro-me* and centered on Christ's personhood that is present in time and space.<sup>331</sup> This presence comes through the church-community in word and sacrament and has a relational ontology. The reason Bonhoeffer states that Christ's position for me is ontic is because this is the essence of Christ's being.<sup>332</sup> However, this *pro-me* stance is not an individual gesture on Christ's part. Bonhoeffer relates that Christ stands 'for-me' for everybody, and therefore for humanity.<sup>333</sup>

In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer emphasizes that; 'Costly grace is the incarnation of God,'<sup>334</sup> he qualifies that the Word of God, is not only the proclamation, but a living person; and that living person is the new humanity that we are all called to participate in through baptism and incorporation into the

---

<sup>329</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Christology' in, *Berlin 1932-1933*. Pp. 310-312.

<sup>330</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 226.

<sup>331</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Christology' in, *Berlin 1932-1933*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009). P. 310.

<sup>332</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Christology' in, *Berlin 1932-1933*. P. 314.

<sup>333</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'Christology' in, *Berlin 1932-1933*. P. 315.

<sup>334</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

church community, the body of Christ.<sup>335</sup> In order to be the new humanity God takes on all of the cost, that is, the suffering, but is pure grace in the gifts God gives in return. As the body of Christ, it must be presumed that the church would act accordingly, which is why suffering is a sign of the true church.<sup>336</sup> The incarnation also signifies Christ's concrete presence in the world, and is the reason behind the church being a visible community.<sup>337</sup> As such Christians are expected to spend their time building up the visible presence of the church.<sup>338</sup>

Incarnational theology is the starting point for Bonhoeffer's theology that is extremely Christocentric. It highlights Bonhoeffer's aim to cement Christ's life as the church-community, describing it as a present reality, visible in extraordinary acts and suffering; and existing to bring in a new humanity.<sup>339</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Bonhoeffer's designations of costly grace can be characterised entirely by a discernable link to God and a concrete presence in the world. As I have already discussed in the section entitled 'Discipleship', Christ's call to follow him in discipleship, necessitates obedience that is grounded in concrete acts. Yet, at the same time, it is a graced call, because it is Christ's summons and it is Christ of whom the believer becomes intimately aware. Similarly, the need for Christians to deny themselves is a concrete reality; it involves renunciation of an old way of being and signifies a movement into the reality of Christ. This movement into Christ transforms a Christian which is one of the identifying aspects of a graced encounter.

---

<sup>335</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 217.

<sup>336</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 89.

<sup>337</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 226.

<sup>338</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 232.

<sup>339</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 226.

Change is apparent in the justification of a sinner, who remains a sinner, but is no longer in the power of sin. The ontological reality for a justified sinner is one of just and sinner simultaneously. This justified state is real and present. However, if cost and grace were not already inseparable in Bonhoeffer's assessment, in the statement that costly grace is the incarnation of God we see how Bonhoeffer merges all of his theology into a central Christology, and by extension ecclesiology.

This emphasis on the church-community living for the world is a common theme in the body of Bonhoeffer's work.<sup>340</sup> It has particular significance in the book *Discipleship*; and in 'Costly Grace' where Bonhoeffer is motivated to create a theology that will counter the effects of the Church Struggle in Germany.<sup>341</sup> With this in mind it is easy to extol Bonhoeffer's motivation, and courageous life story; however, it is not so easy to suggest failings in the work of a person who gave everything to follow Christ. Yet, it *is* necessary to mention the contemporary criticism of his work, which I will do in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Four: Contemporary Criticism of Costly Grace**

### ***Introduction***

For all of the value of Bonhoeffer's work, there are still some serious failings which need to be discussed at length. In this section I will look at some of those weaknesses before I come to my concluding section. I will particularly look at

---

<sup>340</sup> Ruth Zerner. 'Church State and the "Jewish Question."' P. 200.

<sup>341</sup> Clifford J. Green. *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociology*. P. 171.

areas of Pneumatology, Christology, and work's righteousness. However before I do, I will re-capitulate what I have done thus far.

In the second chapter I have discussed Bonhoeffer's use of the term 'cheap grace;' and I came to the conclusion that Jonathon Sorum's assessment of cheap grace was correct. He stated that cheap grace was not grace and that costly grace *was* grace. I suggested that cheap grace was an ironic and sarcastic statement which was used in reaction to Lutherans who spoke of abstract principles, universal forgiveness of sins, ideas of God's comfort, and most seriously the justification of sin rather than the justification of the sinner.

In the third chapter I spoke of Bonhoeffer's idea of costly grace, which was found in the call to discipleship, and the Word of God. I examined Bonhoeffer's treatise that costly grace required obedience (particularly to the Sermon on the Mount), involved self denial, suffering, and persecution; yet that it also gave life and reconciled a person to God and the truth.

In this chapter I will explore the most salient criticisms of Bonhoeffer's work on 'Costly Grace'; noting that some of these themes run right across Bonhoeffer's theology, and could equally be criticised in other works also. The areas of debate I will concentrate on are as follows; First, a perceived lack of Pneumatology in Bonhoeffer's work; Second, I will address the criticism of Bonhoeffer's extreme Christology, as well as giving reasons why this may have developed; and Third, I will evaluate the common charge that *Discipleship* is supports works righteousness.



## ***Pneumatology***

The major area of debate concerning Bonhoeffer's theology has to do with Pneumatology. On one hand there are scholars such as Joel Lawrence who state that it is sufficient for Bonhoeffer to subsume the Holy Spirit into the work of Christ.<sup>342</sup> On the other hand there are scholars such as L. Gregory Jones who believe that Bonhoeffer's lack of pneumatology is problematic from three perspectives. First, it does not consider the role of the Holy Spirit as a 'judge and comforter' who guides the development of the church. Second, there is an imbalance in Bonhoeffer's representation of the triune God. Third, Bonhoeffer's highly immanent representation of the triune God lacks adequate transcendence.<sup>343</sup>

I will discuss Lawrence's perspective first. Lawrence writes that the Holy Spirit in *Discipleship* is strongly represented as it is inter-connected with a strong Christology. This has credence if we consider that the role of the Spirit is to mediate the presence of Christ.<sup>344</sup> However, this perspective loses sight of the traditional view of the Spirit's role as sanctifier as distinct from Christ's redemptive work.<sup>345</sup> In fairness to Bonhoeffer, he does mention the Holy Spirit as being responsible for sanctification, although, he sees sanctification as a 'seal'

---

<sup>342</sup> Joel Lawrence. *Bonhoeffer: A guide for the perplexed*. (New York: T&T Clark, 2010). P. 47.

<sup>343</sup> Gregory L. Jones. 'The Cost of Forgiveness: Grace, Christian Community and The Politics of Worldly Discipleship.' P. 165.

<sup>344</sup> Joel Lawrence. *Bonhoeffer: A guide for the perplexed*. P. 47.

<sup>345</sup> Ed. Editorial staff at the Catholic University of America, Washington, District of Columbia. *New Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. XIII*. (London: The University of America, 1967). P. 575.

which separates the church-community and preserves it until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ,<sup>346</sup> rather than as a guide and comforter for the church.

Jones comments on this weakness in Bonhoeffer's Pneumatology in his first comment, when he states that Bonhoeffer does not see the Holy Spirit as the 'judge and comforter' which guides the church.<sup>347</sup> Jones notes that Bonhoeffer's focus on personal 'responsibility' has less of an organic representation of the church-community, than a highly developed pneumatology would allow for; and he writes; '...Bonhoeffer's account of personal "responsibility" focuses primarily on individual, rather than communal discernment'.<sup>348</sup> Stephen Plant agrees with this assessment, yet, he also notes that Bonhoeffer had moved away from Kierkegaard's extreme individualism to create a community of individuals,<sup>349</sup> and can therefore be credited with developing the pneumatology of the time.

Jones' second concern is that there is an imbalance in Bonhoeffer's representation of the triune God. He writes that the focus on obedience and discipleship, shown in 'Costly Grace' and as the central theme of *Discipleship*, fails to include a theology of the God who is 'sustaining' the community.<sup>350</sup> As I have already mentioned Hardy Arnold noticed this shortfall in Bonhoeffer's theology in 1934, where he wrote in a letter, 'The only thing is that he does not seem to have grasped the issue of church-community as being led by the Spirit of God.'<sup>351</sup> He then goes on to explain in another letter, later in the same year that Bonhoeffer had failed to understand an organic sense of community which

---

<sup>346</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 260.

<sup>347</sup> L. Gregory Jones. 'The Cost of Forgiveness.' P. 164.

<sup>348</sup> L. Gregory Jones. 'The Cost of Forgiveness.' P. 165.

<sup>349</sup> Stephen Plant. *Bonhoeffer*. (New York: Continuum, 2004). P. 49.

<sup>350</sup> L. Gregory Jones. 'The Cost of Forgiveness.' P. 165.

<sup>351</sup> Hardy Arnold. Letter. '114a. Hardy Arnold to Eberhard Arnold.' P. 160.

developed in life, as opposed to an institution which was structured ahead of time.<sup>352</sup>

Jones' third concern is that Bonhoeffer's theology of the triune God is disproportionately immanent. Jones believes that Bonhoeffer's theology would be enhanced if he balanced an immanent with a transcendent representation of God. This would, in Jones' estimation allow for Bonhoeffer to explore the Spirit's work in tending to the church. In Jones' words, 'A more adequate pneumatology would have enabled Bonhoeffer to stress *both* the transcendence and the immanence of the triune God – specifically, by theorizing the Spirit's work in judging, guiding, forming and re-forming the church.'<sup>353</sup> Instead, Bonhoeffer subsumes transcendence in his Christology, representing transcendence in Christ, rather than in Spirit.<sup>354</sup>

In conclusion, I think it is necessary to mention the theological environment at the time of *Discipleship*. Alexander S. Jensen points out that Bonhoeffer was writing before a revival in pneumatology; which came about later in the twentieth century.<sup>355</sup> Indeed, works such as Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* show a neglect of the Spirit; and as Plant remarks, in view of this Bonhoeffer did advance pneumatology.<sup>356</sup> Regardless of Bonhoeffer's experimentation, I think it is fair to say that Bonhoeffer's theology was very much a product of his environment. That will be my main concern when I address his Christology.

Before I speak of Bonhoeffer's Christology, I think it is important to express my own view. I believe, in light of all of the concerns expressed by Jones,

---

<sup>352</sup> Hardy Arnold. Letter. '114b. Hardy Arnold to Edith Boker.' P. 162.

<sup>353</sup> L. Gregory Jones. 'The Cost of Forgiveness,' P. 166.

<sup>354</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'B. Summer Semester 1933' in, *Berlin 1932-1933*. P. 301.

<sup>355</sup> Alexander S. Jensen. 'Schleiermacher and Bonhoeffer as negative theologians: a Western response to some Eastern challenges' in, *St. Mark's Review*, No.. 215. P. 16.

<sup>356</sup> Stephen Plant. *Bonhoeffer*. P. 49.

it would seem that Bonhoeffer has not developed an adequate pneumatology and this has consequences for his expression of cheap and costly grace; as there is always a sense of foregone conclusions in Bonhoeffer's work, rather than a sense of the fluidity of God.

## **Christology**

Bonhoeffer's Christology is commonly referred to as radical or extreme. As I have stated above, part of the reason for this is that Bonhoeffer's life setting was one in which Christology was overly-represented in theology. It would also be amiss not to mention his Lutheran background at this point also. Luther is known for his Christocentric theology which has been suggested may be in reaction to Catholic authority which was established in reference to the Holy Spirit; and the Enthusiasts who also sought Pneumatologically ordained power.<sup>357</sup> Indeed, in *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer does brand the Enthusiasts with cheap grace.<sup>358</sup> However, a comprehensive study of Bonhoeffer's Christology must include Bonhoeffer's psychological stimulus as a contributing factor. Theology which fails to entertain psychology and anthropology, also fails to consider the human factor in religion.

Clifford J. Green points out that the psychological implications of the Christ figure in *Discipleship* requires discussion. In summary he writes that the model of Christ which comes through in *Discipleship*, is one of 'absolute authority' who demands complete renunciation of a healthy human ego, in order to follow a dominating authority, Christ, who requires absolute powerlessness on

---

<sup>357</sup> Veli-Matti Karkkainen. *Pneumatology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002). P. 80.

<sup>358</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 53.

the part of the disciple.<sup>359</sup> This unhealthy unconscious influence can be seen in Bonhoeffer's need to present the disciples either as possessing a combative strength, or in absolute weakness. Green proposed that these inconsistencies are a result of Bonhoeffer's own psychological state, or what Green calls, 'Bonhoeffer's internal conflict;' whereby Bonhoeffer has suppressed a healthy ego.<sup>360</sup>

Moreover, Green suggests that Bonhoeffer created a theology to counter an extreme ideological influence and in doing so unconsciously replicated the power structures which were inherent in Germany at the time.<sup>361</sup> However, not everyone agrees with Green's assessment. The editors' on the English edition of *Discipleship*, writing in answer to Green, remark;

'Bonhoeffer's insistence on faith and active resistance to societal evil makes it a stretch to claim that Bonhoeffer's invocation of the submission to the absolute authority of Christ's teachings and moral commands represent a "power struggle within himself." On the contrary, the themes of obedience to Christ, submission to Christ's commands, and acceptance of suffering, even death in following Jesus "all the way" to the cross, are necessarily arenas of Bonhoeffer's inner conflicts as he submitted his enormous self-will to Jesus Christ.'<sup>362</sup>

Yet, the argument that Kelly and Godsey, as the editor's of the English edition of *Discipleship*, propose is in some ways a non-argument as they have not engaged Green's psychological lens. A discussion of psychological models of self and the unconscious is beyond the scope of this document, yet it is necessary in order to

---

<sup>359</sup> Clifford J. Green. *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociology*. P. 171.

<sup>360</sup> Clifford J. Green. *Bonhoeffer. A Theology of Sociology*. P. 175.

<sup>361</sup> Clifford J. Green. *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociology*. P. 178.

<sup>362</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. 'Editors' Introduction to the English Edition.' P. 22.

refute Green's observation. However, I do believe, as I mention in the introduction of this thesis that there is a sense of theological duress in Bonhoeffer's theology of costly grace; and I suspect this is the reason why.

### ***Works Righteousness***

Contemporary theologians such as J. Harold Ellens,<sup>363</sup> and Samuel C. Smith,<sup>364</sup> show concern over what would seem to be a works-righteousness approach taken by Bonhoeffer. Ellens argues against Bonhoeffer's seemingly conditional/moralistic theology, and lack of awareness of the psychological impact of conditionalism/moralism, as opposed to the radical nature of a biblical theology of grace that transforms individuals and society at a deeper core-level. Smith, similarly writes that Bonhoeffer's theology places conditions on justification, and even though Bonhoeffer's conditions are not 'self-meritorious' this controverts the essential Reformation message. I will begin by looking at Ellens' criticism.

In his seminal work on the relationship between grace and psycho-spiritual health, *Radical Grace*, Ellens' writes;

'Bonhoeffer replaces grace with old-fashioned and incorrect medieval moralism and mechanistic religion. His "cheap grace" idea implies that he longs again for a kind of legalism and conditionalism that will shape us up. Grace is free, radical, universal, or it is not grace, no good news at all, since if it is not, it fails to get to the center of the pathology we are

---

<sup>363</sup> J. Harold Ellens. *Radical Grace*. (London: Praeger Publishers, 2007). P. 52.

<sup>364</sup> Samuel C. Smith. 'A Critique of Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at all Costs,' in *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 2007. P. 78.

otherwise hopelessly locked into forever. It fails to free us from the destructive and distracting anxiety that produces all sickness and sin.’<sup>365</sup>

The salient difference in the work of Bonhoeffer and Ellens is the use of psychological inquiry. Whereas Ellens employs a psychological lens, Bonhoeffer was adamantly opposed to psychology.<sup>366</sup> In *Life Together* Bonhoeffer writes;

‘Only another Christian who is under the cross can hear my confession...The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot comprehend this one thing; what sin is. [Psychology] does not know the ungodliness of the human being. And so it does not know that human beings are ruined only by their sin and are healed only by forgiveness’.<sup>367</sup>

The difficulty with Bonhoeffer’s anti-psychology position is that he speaks numerous times of the impact of grace on psychological stressors. Bonhoeffer writes of the ability of costly grace to relieve anxiety,<sup>368</sup> to heal ‘the fearful spirit and the broken heart’<sup>369</sup> and of the comfort that costly grace brings.<sup>370</sup> I believe it may be posited that without taking into consideration psychological factors Bonhoeffer can only speak of these elements on a surface level. Ellens writes of anxiety and dysfunction being at the core of our being, and informing our decisions in life consciously and unconsciously. For Ellens it is the ability of grace to touch and heal us at this core level which is truly significant. Furthermore, Ellens states that

---

<sup>365</sup> J. Harold Ellens. *Radical Grace*. P. 52.

<sup>366</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Life Together*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 5. Ed. English edition. Geoffrey B. Kelly. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).P. 115.

<sup>367</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Life Together*. P. 115.

<sup>368</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 49.

<sup>369</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

<sup>370</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 45.

grace has the ability to transform humanity as religious metaphors inform the entire worldview.<sup>371</sup>

Smith also takes exception at Bonhoeffer's theology which he believes makes justification conditional on obedience. He writes;

'For one to make obedience a condition for justification as long as it is not seen as self-meritorious is in complete opposition to the message of the Protestant Reformation, and more importantly, the Bible. The early reformers believed that any conditions added to faith (self-meritorious or not) resulted in the *nullification* of grace (emphasis mine).'<sup>372</sup>

Smith's assessment on Bonhoeffer's work runs against Bonhoeffer's theory that obedience guards a person against self-justification.<sup>373</sup> However, by making our salvation contingent upon works, Bonhoeffer makes our relationship with God conditional. For example Bonhoeffer writes:

'Since we shall be judged according to our works, we stand under the command to do 'good work'...Grace and deed belong together. There is no faith without the good work, just as there is no good work without faith. Christians need to do good work for the sake of their salvation. For whoever is found to be doing evil works shall not see the kingdom of God. Thus the good work is the goal to being a Christian. In this life, there is only one thing of real importance, namely, how we can give a good account of ourselves in the last judgement. And because all persons will be

---

<sup>371</sup> J. Harold Ellens. *Radical Grace*. P. 5

<sup>372</sup> Samuel C. Smith. 'A Critique of Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at all Costs'. P. 76.

<sup>373</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 81.



judged according to works, it is of utmost importance that Christians be prepared to do good works.’<sup>374</sup>

In order to discuss this passage in *Discipleship*, it is necessary to examine Bonhoeffer’s idea of ‘good works’. Bonhoeffer states that good works are the product of faith whereas evil works are a product of sin, which Bonhoeffer speaks of as a distance from God. The ability for the Christian to continue to do good works therefore is a matter of his or her ongoing sanctification, or constant connection to God. This might suggest that salvation is not contingent upon good works per se, but that good works are inseparable from faith which finds expression in obedience.<sup>375</sup> However, this idea is contrary to Luther’s writings on Christ as both ‘gift’ and ‘example’. Luther makes a clear distinction between gift, and example; and writes that the foundation of the gospel is that the encounter is recognized as a gift from God.<sup>376</sup> Ellens work echoes this idea as he remarks that it is only the unconditional gift of God’s grace which heals individuals and society.<sup>377</sup>

Moreover, we find in Bonhoeffer’s treatise the same model which Green has identified in his Christology; namely, the tendency to counter an extreme argument with an equally extreme counter-attack.<sup>378</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Upon examining Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of Pneumatology, Christology, and the all-sufficiency of grace, I have noted that significant deficiencies exist. The first subject I looked at was Bonhoeffer’s Pneumatology. As noted, Lawrence

---

<sup>374</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 278.

<sup>375</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. P. 277.

<sup>376</sup> Oswald Bayer. *Martin Luther’s Theology*. P. 64.

<sup>377</sup> J. Harold Ellens. *Radical Grace*. P. 5.

<sup>378</sup> Clifford J. Green. *A Theology of Sociology*. P. 178.

writes that it was adequate for Bonhoeffer to subsume his theology of the Holy Spirit into Christology. However, Jones makes a comprehensive critique of the weaknesses in Bonhoeffer's Pneumatology; stating that it is inadequate on three fronts. First, as it does not consider the role of the Spirit as judge and comforter. Second, the triune God is not equally represented. Third, Bonhoeffer's immanent theology lacks sufficient transcendence. Overall I agree with the propositions that Bonhoeffer's Pneumatology is lacking in the ways and for the reasons given above.

I have also looked at Bonhoeffer's Christology that has been described as radical; and explored reasons why he may have adopted such an extreme stance. Following Green's criticism I believe that the use of a psychological lens shows that Bonhoeffer has created an imbalanced power structure between Christ and the disciples, because of the unconscious effects of the influence which surrounded him; and because the natural tendency of creating a counter argument is to create an extreme counter attack, rather than a moderate argument.

Following from the psychological theme which must play a large part in examining Bonhoeffer's work due to the unique and extreme psychological stressors of the time; and because of Bonhoeffer's own reference to psychological conditions in 'Costly Grace', I have suggested that a works-righteous theology does not produce psychological benefits. Moreover, I have examined Smith's assertion that Bonhoeffer's theology is works-based, even though the works are not self-meritorious, and have presented Smith's argument that Bonhoeffer's theology of grace is not in keeping with either a biblical or traditional Reformation understanding of grace.

In the conclusion to the thesis, I will re-capitulate what I have discovered in my research, and present the overall findings.

## **Conclusion To the Entire Thesis**

### ***Bonhoeffer's assessment of Discipleship***

Towards the end of Bonhoeffer's life, he wrote his own assessment of *Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer wrote; 'I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or some thing like it, I suppose I wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* at the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, although I still stand by what I wrote.'<sup>379</sup> Bonhoeffer wrote this reflective statement in a letter to his friend Eberhard Bethge from prison after he learned of the failed attempt to kill Hitler. It is not surprising therefore, that Bonhoeffer would consider his friendship with the pacifist Jean Lasserre (whom he mentions directly before the quote). This is a friendship I have already mentioned influenced the writing of *Discipleship*. Yet, it is not for Lasserre's pacifism that Bonhoeffer thinks of him, but rather Bonhoeffer reflects on Lasserre's desire to become a saint. Bonhoeffer then goes on to say, quizzically, that he is sure, Lasserre became a saint, but that is not what he wants from himself. Rather, Bonhoeffer wanted to be completely of the world, and for the world; but more importantly Bonhoeffer sought to be completely in Christ by renouncing any means of self. In doing this Bonhoeffer believed he could abandon himself to God in all of the intricacies of God's creation. For example he writes;

---

<sup>379</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Letter '178. To Eberhard Bethge.' P. 486.

‘Later on I discovered, and am still discovering to this day, that one only learns to have faith by living in this-worldliness of life. If one has completely renounced making something of oneself-whether it be a saint or a converted sinner or a church leader...a just or an unjust person, a sick or a healthy person-then one throws oneself completely into the arms of God, and this is what I call this-worldliness: living fully in the midst of life’s tasks, questions, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities-then one takes seriously no longer one’s own sufferings but rather the sufferings of God in the world. The one stays awake with Christ in Gethsemane. And I think this is faith...and that is how one becomes a human being, a Christian.’<sup>380</sup>

It can be suggested that the danger Bonhoeffer sees in his book is that the kind of obedience Bonhoeffer asks for in *Discipleship* makes Christians make something out of themselves, or strive for sainthood, rather than just *being*. This sense of *being* Christ, and *being* for the world is what Bonhoeffer stands by in his book *Discipleship*. This sense of just *being* is probably what the preacher I spoke of in the introduction did not convey.

## ***Findings***

In conclusion: In the introduction of this thesis I stated that I would discuss ‘Costly Grace’ from an historical/critical perspective in order to examine the connection between faith and uncompromising action. I believe I have considered the historical perspective on a few different fronts. First, I have looked at the unique environmental factors which shaped Bonhoeffer’s theology, and created

---

<sup>380</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Letter. ‘178. To Eberhard Bethge.’ P. 486.

the urgency for a theology based around social action. Second, I have addressed the church in Germany, during the Hitler Regime which Bonhoeffer is dialoguing with, and Third, I have proposed the personal effects of external stimuli on Bonhoeffer as a theologian.

The environmental factors I have described surround life in Nazi Germany during the Second World War. To be more specific, Bonhoeffer's life can be characterised by his role as a pastor, and theologian who was actively engaged in the Church Struggle. Most notably, as I have already mentioned, Bonhoeffer was the director of an illegal seminary for the Confessing Church. This is important as it contributes to the separatism which comes through in Bonhoeffer's theology, and his focus on suffering, and persecution.

The theology of the time was varied, yet, Bonhoeffer is most alarmed by churches which seemed to support Nationalism, lacked obedience to Christ's commands, and offered a surface kind of spirituality which focused on traditions and Creeds, rather than acknowledging the consequences which come with following Christ. In Bonhoeffer's most strident attack, he mentions that these churches not only deny Christ, but they also justify sin. Moreover, Bonhoeffer mentions that they are responsible for keeping Christians who were not theologically aware away from salvation and in a life of disobedience. This divide between obedience/disobedience, or belief/unbelief, is characteristic by what I describe as Bonhoeffer's uncompromising call to action.

The personal effects of the environment on Bonhoeffer's theology, I propose can be considered from a psychological lens. In particular I mention Clifford Green's assessment that Bonhoeffer created a theology from his own

internal struggle which unwittingly mirrored the power structure in Germany at the time.

Critically I have considered Bonhoeffer's theology against the major criticisms which include the belief that Bonhoeffer's Pneumatology is lacking, his Christology is extreme, and that Bonhoeffer's theology is works-righteous. I have suggested that all of these criticisms have substance behind them. Most notably Bonhoeffer's theology of the Holy Spirit seems to be lacking as he channels all of his theology in *Discipleship* through obedience to Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. This too raises the contentious question of whether or not he has created a works righteous theology, which I believe may have some credence.

If I were to take these conclusions and apply them to the preacher at my local church, I would have to say that he took the 'cost' element of Bonhoeffer's treatise and left behind the grace. For example, the congregation was castigated for not doing enough good deeds, and not giving enough money. Yet, he forgot to mention grace. He did not tell me that Bonhoeffer spoke of the joy which comes with discipleship, nor did he tell me that I would be conforming to Christ and moving into the truth of my existence. This is an important omission, because when grace is not mentioned, spiritual significance is lost, and the heart of Reformation theology is compromised. This is something Bonhoeffer would never approve of.

## Bibliography

Arnold, Hardy. '114b. Hardy Arnold to Edith Boker' in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *London 1933-1935*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Barton, Stephen C. '1 Corinthians' in, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Eds. James D.G. Dunn & John W. Rogerson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003.

Bayer, Oswald. *Martin Luther's Theology*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.

Bell, G.K.A. 'Foreword' in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. London: SCM Press, 1959.

Bergen, L. Doris. *Twisted Cross: the German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996.

Bethge, Eberhard. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A Biography*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Act & Being*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 2. Ed. English version. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Discipleship*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 4. Ed. English version. Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 5. Ed. English edition, Geoffrey B. Kelly. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 'The Way to Freedom' as found in, 'Editors' Afterward to the German Edition' in, *Discipleship*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 4. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 'Worldly Preaching' (Finkewalde lectures on Homiletics), as found in, De Lange, Frits. *Waiting for the Word*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 'Christ and Peace.' As found in, Larry L. Rasmussen. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 'Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity' in, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 10 Ed. English edition. Clifford J. Green. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. '21. Catechesis in the Second Theological Examination on the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, Berlin, June 29, 1930' in, *Barcelona*,

*Berlin, New York. 1928-1931.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 10. Ed. English edition. Clifford J. Green. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 'Sermon on 1 John 4:16. New York, November 9, 1930' in, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 10. Ed. English edition. Clifford J. Green. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Letter. '193. To Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer' in, *London 1933-1935.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. '1933 Annual Report of the German Evangelical Church of Sydenham, London' in, *London 1933-1935.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. '2. Sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:10. London, Repentance Day 19, 1933' in, *London 1933-1935.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Letter. '127 Reinhold Niebuhr' in, *London, 1933-1935.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. '12. Sermon on Luke 13:1-5. London, Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 8, 1934' in, *London 1933-1935.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. '93. Letter to Erwin Sutz' in, *London 1933-1935.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 'Sermon on Wisdom 3:3. London, November 26, 1933' in, *London, 1933-1935.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. '14. Sermon on 1 Corinthians 13:1-3' in, *London 1933-1935.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. '17. Sermon of 1 Corinthians 13:13. London, Reformation Sunday, November 4, 1934' in, *London, 1933-1935.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 13. Ed. English edition. Keith Clements. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 'Christology' in, *Berlin, 1932-1933.* Ed. English edition. Larry L. Rasmussen. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'B. Summer Semester 1933' in, *Berlin 1932-1933.* Ed. English edition. Larry L. Rasmussen. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.



Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 'Concerning the Christian Idea of God' in, *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. 12. No. 2. (April, 1932) Published by the University of Chicago Press.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Gesammelte Schriften*. As found in, Clifford J. Green. *Bonhoeffer. A Theology of Sociology*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Letter. '178. To Eberhard Bethge' in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 8. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Ed. English edition. John W. De Gruchy. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 'The Question About the Community of the Church' as found in, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Ed. John W. De Gruchy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Bray, Michael. *A Time to Kill: A Study Concerning the Use of Force and Abortion*. Oregon: Advocates for Life Publications, 1994.

De Lange, Fritz. *Waiting for the Word*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.  
Ed. Betz, Hans Dieter. *Religion Past and Present. Vol IV*. Leida: Brill, 2008.

Dramm, Sabine. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. An Introduction to his Thought*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007.

Ellens, Harold J. *Radical Grace*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007.

Ed. Editorial Staff at the Catholic University of America, Washington, District of Columbia. *New Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. XIII*. New York: The Catholic University of America, 1967.

Frick, Peter. *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.

Gibbs, Raymond W. 'On the psycholinguists of sarcasm' in, *Journal of Experimental Psychology. General Vol. 115 (1)*. Published online March 1986.

Golomb, Jacob. 'Kiekegaard's ironic ladder to authentic to faith' in, *Philosophy of Religion* 32. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991.

Gouwens, David Jay. *Kiekegaard as Religious Thinker*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Green, Clifford J. *Bonhoeffer. A Theology of Sociology*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.

Green, Clifford J. 'Human Sociality and Christian Community' in, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Ed. John W. De Gruchy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Green, Clifford J. 'Editor's Introduction' in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Sanctorum Communio: A theological study of the sociology of the church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

Green, Clifford J. 'Editor's Introduction to the English Edition' in, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York 1928-1931*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 10. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Guroian, Vigen. 'Church and Nationhood: A Reflection on the National Church' in, *Theology and the Practise of Theology*. Ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and Charles Marsh. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994.

Ed. Hillerbrand, Hans J. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*. Vol. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Huber, Wolfgang. 'Bonhoeffer and Modernity' in, *Theology and the Practise of Responsibility*. Ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., and Charles Marsh. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994.

Jensen. Alexander S. 'Schleiermacher and Bonhoeffer as negative theologians: a Western Response to some Eastern challenges' in, *St. Mark's Review*. No. 215. (February 2011).

Jones. Gregory, L. 'The Cost of Forgiveness: Grace, Christian Community and the Politics of Worldly Discipleship' in, Ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. and Charles Marsh. *Theology and the Practise of Responsibility*. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994.

Karkkainen, Veli-Matti. *Pneumatology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2002.

Kelly, Geoffrey B. & Godsey, John D. 'Editors' Introduction to the English Edition' in, *Discipleship*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 4. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Kelly, Geoffrey B. & Godsey, John D. 'Footnote [1]' in, *Discipleship*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 4. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Kelly, Geoffrey B. & Godsey, John D. 'Footnote [91]' in, *Discipleship*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 4. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Kelly, Geoffrey B. & Godsey, John D. 'Preface' in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 4. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Kelly. Geoffrey B. & Godsey, John D. 'Editors' Afterword to the German edition' in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 4. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Kelly, Geoffrey B. 'The influence of Kiekegaard on Bonhoeffer's Concept of Discipleship' in, *Irish Theological Quarterly*. June 1974 vol. 41. no. 2.

Kelly, Geoffrey B. 'Bonhoeffer and Romero' in, *Theology and the Practise of Responsibility*. Ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. & Charles Marsh. Valley Forge: Trinity International Press, 1994.

Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Concept of Irony*. London: Collins, 1966.

Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Journals of Kierkegaard. 1834-1854*. As found in, Geoffrey B. Kelly. 'The influence of Kierkegaard on Bonhoeffer's Concept of Discipleship' in, *Irish Theological Quarterly*. June 1974 vol. 41. no. 2.

Lawrence, Joel. *Bonhoeffer: A guide for the perplexed*. New York: T&T Clark, 2010.

Lohse, Bernhard. *Martin Luther's Theology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2010.

Luther, Martin. 'Concerning Christian Liberty' in, *Luther's Works. Vol. 31*. Ed. H. J. Grimm. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957.

Luther, Martin. 'Temporal Authority' in, *Luther's Works. Vol. 45*. Ed. Walter I. Brandt. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962.

Luther, Martin. 'Whether Soldiers Too Can be Saved' in, *Luther's Works. Vol. 46*. Ed. Robert C. Shultz. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967.

Luther, Martin. 'Twelfth Schwabach Article, 1529,' as found in, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Discipleship*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 4. Ed. English version. Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Meeks. Wayne A. *The HarperCollins Study Bible. NRSV*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989.

Nail, Debra. 'Socrates' in, *The Stamford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Spring 2010 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. URL=<http://plato.encyclopedia.edu/archives/spring2010/entires/socrates>.

Pangritz, Andrea. 'Who is Jesus for us Today' in, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*.ed. John W. De Gruchy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Plant, Stephen. *Bonhoeffer*. New York: Continuum, 2004.

Pugh, Jeffrey. *Religionless Christianity*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2008.

Rae, Murray. *Kierkegaard and Theology*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2010.

Roy, Alice Myers. 'The Function of Irony in Discourse' in, *Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse*. Vol. 1. Issue 4, ISSN (Online) 1613-4117. Published online 12/11/2009.

Samay-Tsoory, S. G., Tomer. R & Aharon-Peretz, J. 'The Neuroanatomical Basis of Understanding Sarcasm and its Relationship to Social Cognition' in, *Neuropsychology*. Vol. 19. No. 3. URL=<http://www.apa.org/news/press/release/205/05/sarcasm.aspx>

Selby, Peter. 'Christianity in a World Come of Age' in, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Ed. John W. De Gruchy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Slane, Craig. *Bonhoeffer as Martyr: Social Responsibility and Modern Christian Commitment*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004.

Smith, Samuel C. 'A Critique of Bonhoeffer Speaks Today: Following Jesus at all Costs' in, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. Autumn 2007.

Sorum, Jonathan D. 'Cheap Grace, Costly Grace and Just Plain Grace: Bonhoeffer's Defense of Justification by Faith Alone' as found in, 'Editor's Introduction to the English Edition' in, *Discipleship*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Vol. 4. Ed. English version. Geoffrey B. Kelly & John D. Godsey. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Von Dietze, Erich. 'When Are You Returning to the Real Ministry? Dietrich Bonhoeffer's continuing legacy and inspiration.' Unpublished work.

Wannwenwetsch, Bernd. 'Luther's Moral Theology' in, *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Wilmer, Haddon. 'Costly Discipleship' in, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Ed. John w. De Gruchy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Zerner, Ruth. 'Church, state, and the "Jewish question"' in, *Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Ed. John W. De. Gruchy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

*Luther, Martin. "Concerning Christian Liberty." In Luther's Works, edited by Harold J. Grimm. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957.*

