

What Is “Acting Ethically” in the Crisis? A Bonhoefferian Christian Discipleship Perspective. – von Walton Padelford

15 Seiten

Sprache: englisch

Keywords: Ethics, personal
integrity, ethical conflict,
Bonhoeffer, Ethik, persön-
liche Integrität, ethischer
Konflikt, Bonhoeffer

Abstract

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, famous 20th century theologian and conspirator against the Hitler regime is an outstanding example of ethical courage. In his early theological work Bonhoeffer taught that Christians may not use weapons against each other because that would be using weapons against Christ himself. Pacifism was his means of resisting the Nazi regime. After several years, through the offices of his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, Bonhoeffer took a position with the Abwehr, the military counter-intelligence service. It was here that he entered into a conspiracy against Hitler. Bonhoeffer's adult life was formed by a pressure-filled crisis. It is from the decisions of his life and his teaching in his books including Ethics that some moral compass may be found which can help the worker, manager or executive to live with integrity in various deteriorating ethical situations.

Zusammenfassung

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ein berühmter Theologe des 20. Jahrhunderts und im Widerstand gegen das Hitlerregime, ist ein herausragendes Beispiel ethischer Courage. In seinem frühen Werk lehrte Bonhoeffer, dass Christen Waffen nicht gegeneinander einsetzen sollten, weil das wie die Waffen auf Christus selbst zu richten zu sehen ist. Pazifismus war der Weg, dem Naziregime Widerstand zu leisten. Nach einigen Jahren schloss sich Bonhoeffer über seinen Schwager Hans von Dohnanyi der Abwehr, dem militärischen Spionageabwehrdienst an und schloss sich damit der Verschwörung gegen Hitler an. Bonhoeffers Leben war durch eine schwer belastende Krise geprägt. Seine Entscheidungen in dieser Krise und die Lehre in seinen Schriften (die Ethik eingeschlossen) können als Kompass dienen, der den Arbeitnehmern, den Managern oder den Beamten hilft ein integrires Leben in verschiedenen sich verschlechternden ethischen Situationen zu leben.

Mohandas Gandhi scorned “dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.”^[1] Likewise one cannot create ethical systems that are unexceptionable or that provide clear answers to all ethical cases. However, many ethical cases are clear. The appropriate action calls for courage on the part of the worker, the laborer, the executive. An outstanding case of ethical courage in action is presented through the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, famous 20th century theologian and conspirator against the Hitler regime. The crisis in view in this paper was the horrific political crisis during the 1930’s and 1940’s in Germany. Following Bonhoeffer’s lead in his book, *Ethics*, I would like to show that as a Christian businessperson, my goal should be that God will be known to be reality in me and through me. This, then, becomes the first principle of all business ethical reflection. For those unfamiliar with the life story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I present a brief historical sketch before continuing with the argument of the paper. This brief sketch mentions Bonhoeffer’s journey from pacifist to conspirator against Hitler as an illustration of his ethical position that our relationship with God provides our ethical compass rather than strict adherence to an ethical law.

Brief History

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the sixth child born to Dr. Karl Bonhoeffer and Paula von Hase. Dietrich was brought up in one of the elite families in Germany—patriotic, not extravagantly nationalistic, responsible, humanistic, and university-oriented. He completed his doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, in 1927 at the incredibly young age of twenty one, and by 1930 he was a lecturer at the University of Berlin. During a year of post-doctoral study at Union Theological Seminary in New York, Dietrich became friends with Paul Lassere, a French Protestant, and committed pacifist. Through this friendship Bonhoeffer embraced pacifism as he read it in the Sermon on the Mount. This was his first great theological theme. In writing to his brothers he said: “I think I know that I would really become clear and honest with myself if I really began to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously... There are things which it is worth supporting without compromise. And it seems to me that these include peace and social justice, or in fact Christ.”^[2]

On February 1, 1933, two days after Hitler’s accession to power on January 30, the young lecturer gave a radio broadcast entitled, “The Leader and the Individual in the Younger Generation.” The invitation was probably worked out through the university. The lecture was cut off and not allowed to be completed.

[1] E.F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 24.

[2] Renate Wind, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Spoke in the Wheel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998) 53-54.

It is amazing how early Bonhoeffer saw the way things were going with the Fuhrer, particularly as much of the Protestant church was falling in line behind Hitler. Already in existence was a Protestant group which called itself "The German Christians." Its aim was to combine Christianity with National Socialism. Hitler reciprocated this good feeling by ordering whole SA units to attend church. However, shortly thereafter, the party's true colors showed. "By 1934 party leaders were discouraging church membership in the SA;..."[3] This began the crisis for Dietrich Bonhoeffer—the church struggle, or *kirchenkampf*. The proximate cause of this struggle was the attempt to mingle Nazi ideology with Christian theology, thus corrupting it. This struggle further manifested itself in the passage of the Aryan clause which prohibited anyone of Jewish descent from serving in the German civil service. This affected the churches because ministers were on the payroll of the state and hence members of the German civil service. This clause, if adopted by the church, would make it impossible for Christians of Jewish background to train for the Christian ministry. The Aryan clause was adopted by the national church in 1933. At this point two thousand pastors signed a resolution to reverse the Aryan clause; among them was Pastor Martin Niemöller, a former U-boat commander in World War I. Pastor Niemöller founded the Pastor's Emergency League to protest inclusion of the Aryan paragraph in the order of the national church. This was a step toward the formation of the Confessing Church. On September 12, 1933, Pastor Niemöller called on German pastors to commit to the following four points: "(1) To a new allegiance to the Scriptures and confessions, (2) to resist infringement of these, (3) to give financial help to those affected by the law or by violence, and (4) to reject the Aryan clause." [4] By the end of 1933 the Pastors' Emergency League had six thousand members. In 1934 these opposition churches adopted the Barmen Declaration which had been written by Karl Barth. They thus became known as the Confessing Church. In August, 1934, Dietrich had taken part in the ecumenical youth conference at Fanö, Denmark. It was here that he preached his famous peace sermon using as his text Psalm 85:8, "Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints;..."

How does peace come about? Through a system of political treaties? Through the investment of international capital in different countries? Or through universal peaceful rearmament in order to guarantee peace? Through none of these, for the sole reason that in all of them peace is confused with safety. There is no way to peace along the way of safety.... Once again how will peace come? Who will call us to peace so that the world will hear, will have to hear?... Only the one great ecumenical council of the holy church of Christ over all the world can speak out so that the world, though it gnash its teeth, will have to hear, so that the peoples will rejoice because the church of Christ in the name of Christ has taken

[3] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *London, 1933-1935*, DBWE Vol. 13 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) 44.

75 [4] Bonhoeffer, *London* 309.

the weapons from the hands of their sons, forbidden war, proclaimed the peace of Christ against the raging world.”[5]

Bonhoeffer preached that Christians may not use weapons against each other because that would be using weapons against Christ himself. He, no doubt, saw the clouds of war gathering. Preaching peace was also connected with the freedom to proclaim the gospel and confess the faith in Germany, for he also foresaw the terrible persecution time coming under Hitler. In other words, pacifism was a means of beginning to resist the Nazi regime. The continued story of Bonhoeffer's life is fantastically interesting. It includes several years as professor and mentor at illegal seminaries of the Confessing Church, a brief stint in America to avoid the Hitler draft after which time he returned to Germany to suffer with his people. As the grip of the state became stronger, many citizens found it safer not to know many things that were going on in the Third Reich. Bonhoeffer desired to be politically informed. He felt it was part of his responsibility for the future of the Church and Germany. He began a friendship with Hans von Dohnanyi, who frequented the Bonhoeffer's house in Berlin. Von Dohnanyi was a brilliant jurist, never part of any National Socialist organizations, and eventual private secretary to Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, who was head of Germany's counter-intelligence service, the *Abwehr*. It was as a member of this group that von Dohnanyi became an integral part of conspiracy plots to overthrow Hitler. Bonhoeffer was privy to their discussions. One evening von Dohnanyi asked him to comment on Matthew 26:52 "all who take the sword will perish by the sword." Dietrich replied that this was true for the circle of conspirators as well, but that the times called for men to take up that responsibility.[6] Thus Dietrich obtained employment in the *Abwehr* and entered a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler.

Bonhoeffer's move from pacifism to conspirator was not as puzzling as it seems at first glance. He was zealous for the truth of the gospel and the freedom to preach the gospel. In light of those overarching goals, Bonhoeffer's actions were responses to the situation at hand and a response to the will of God. In a more basic way the question is "What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ?" To this question, Bonhoeffer's life gives us an unusual picture. Certainly the unique people that he knew gave him entrance into the conspiracy against Hitler. Most Christians in Germany were not in that position.

Emmi Bonhoeffer (the wife of Klaus, Dietrich's brother) related her question to Dietrich and his response, "How is that with you Christians? You will not kill, but that another one does it; you agree, and you are glad about it—how is that?" Dietrich replied, "One shouldn't be glad about it, but I understand what you mean. It is out of the question for a Christian to ask someone else to do the dirty work so that he can keep his own hands clean. If one sees that something needs to be done, then one must be prepared to do it whether one is a Christian

[5] Eberhard Bethge, Renate Bethge, and Christian Gremmels, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Life in Pictures* (London: SCM Press, 1986) 133.

[6] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000) 625.



or not. If one sees the task as necessary according to one’s own conscience. If I see that a madman is driving a car into a group of innocent bystanders, then I can’t as a Christian simply wait for the catastrophe and comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrest the steering wheel out of the hands of the madman.”

Emmi Bonhoeffer analyzed this moment: “That’s the way he came into the conspiracy. It’s not a break in his life that he was first a pacifist and first a pious child, and then a helpful young man and later on suddenly he became a politician. It’s a quite clear line, going through; but the situations changed and the tasks changed.”^[7] This is the clear line in Bonhoeffer’s ethical journey. He did not adhere to an ethical position of strict pacifism. His changed stance was a result of new circumstances and the actions that God required of him as a result of Bonhoeffer’s continuing discipleship relationship.

The rest of Bonhoeffer’s life was occupied in travel for the *Abwehr*, meeting with foreign church leaders for purposes of passing along information about the resistance in Germany, and writing his unfinished work, *Ethics*. He was eventually arrested and spent two years in prison before he was executed on April 9, 1945, around one month before the end of the war in Europe.

From Bonhoeffer’s Writings to Business Ethics

Bonhoeffer’s adult life was formed by a pressure-filled crisis, and his action and response to that crisis. It is from the picture of his life and his teaching in his book *Ethics* and other works that some moral compass may be found which can help the worker, manager or executive to live with integrity in various deteriorating ethical situations. To better understand this, it is well to comprehend Bonhoeffer’s view of ethics in general by looking at his book, *Ethics* which was written in moments of quiet meditation at the Franciscan monastery of Ettal in Bavaria. It was also written in moments of hurry during travels, and it was written in prison. It is really a long series of meditations rather than a carefully finished product. It is a fragment. However, this fragment along with *Letters and Papers from Prison*, is largely responsible for his growing reputation.

In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer provides us with a new perspective. He makes us think. He brings something unique to the discussion of ethics as a Christian. In the darkening situation in Germany that Bonhoeffer faced after his return from America in 1939 he said, “To want to be only a Christian, a timeless disciple—that now became a costly privilege. To become engaged for his times, where he stood, was far more open to misinterpretation, less glorious, more confined. Yet this



alone was what it now meant to be a Christian.”[8] Bonhoeffer was writing and living *Ethics* simultaneously in a crucible of violence, intrigue, cynicism, deceit, and horror. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer leaves us the writings of one who was trying to live as a true disciple of Christ in the Third Reich. The theme of business ethics will be discussed from Bonhoeffer’s perspective in his book *Ethics*.

In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer begins before the Fall with man’s uninterrupted relationship with God. In that situation man knew only good. No confusion or hesitancy of decision-making was present. Sin then enters the world, and our knowledge of good and evil begins. Therefore, “...in the possibility of the knowledge of good and evil Christian ethics discerns a falling away from the origin.”[9] *Ethics* is an attempt to think through our new relationship with God and with other human beings after the Fall. It is not a prideful study, but one undertaken with humility given our experiential knowledge of evil and the struggle we encounter in “doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.” Humility is the order of the day since even the voice of our conscience is problematic. Before the Fall there was no conscience. Conscience came into existence with the Fall and is therefore part of the Fall. Conscience deals with the permitted and the forbidden. It does not embrace the whole of life like the Word or the Commandment of God, and it is concerned basically with man’s relation with himself—to his better self. Although conscience can provide an important warning about various actions, we need to be careful. When conscience pretends to be the voice of God, it may, in fact, be the voice of the devil.[10]

Cases and Character

There seems to be in the presentation of university business ethics the interminable discussion of cases and the correct ethical resolution of these cases. This is standard pedagogy. It is probably beneficial to the students to read some cases that have subtle ethical decision-making involved or blatant wrongs which were unopposed by the whole organization. The cases of blatant wrong raise questions of will and courage, as in, “Why didn’t someone do the right thing?” Courage, from the derivation of its name, has something to do with the heart. If students’ hearts are strengthened for doing good, casework can be appropriately applauded. The standard of good in many of these cases is evident. There is usually no big mystery as to the right course of action.

[8] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000) 678.

[9] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, (New York: Touchstone, 1995) 21.

[10] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *London, 1933-1935*, DBWE Vol. 13 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) 315.



The ethical imperative here is straightforward. One should do good and avoid evil. Who could object? Perhaps more subtly, we might say, one should be good by doing good. In other words, the results of these discussions are that one should be good and do good. However, here Bonhoeffer states that we are back in the old self-centered ethic.

If the ethical problem presents itself essentially in the form of enquiries about one's own being good and doing good, this means that it has already been decided that it is the self and the world which are the ultimate reality. The aim of all ethical reflection is, then, that I myself shall be good and that the world shall become good through my action. But the problem of ethics at once assumes a new aspect if it becomes apparent that these realities, myself and the world, themselves lie imbedded in a quite different ultimate reality, namely, the reality of God, the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer. What is of ultimate importance is now no longer that I should become good, or that the condition of the world would be made better by my action, but that the reality of God should show itself everywhere to be the ultimate reality. Where there is faith in God as the ultimate reality, all concern with ethics will have as its starting-point that God shows Himself to be good, even if this involves the risk that I myself and the world are not good but thoroughly bad.[11]

Business ethics in dealing with commercial activity in all its forms admits that we have fallen away from our original relationship with God and that we are in an intense relationship with the world, i.e. the fallen world. Therefore, any attempt to impose millennium-like notions upon the world of business must be rejected at the outset. The world of business is apart from God in the sense that we are apart from God since the Fall. It is from this sober assessment of humankind's condition that the discussion of ethics proceeds. "Man's life is now disunion with God, with men, with things, and with himself." [12] A burgeoning economy does not indicate peace with God, unity with other men, nor internal or external peace. Business ethics is *par excellence* a discussion of life in this world. Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the "this-worldliness" of Christianity should fit in well with our journey through this most worldly of endeavors—business. "One must live through the tension between being a Christian and being in the world if one is to avoid the mere spouting of empty religious phrases." [13]

The Fall brings us back to a view of the disunion that exists between human beings in all our social relationships. There is a certain lack of love in our actions, or might we say an excess of self-love? Self-love is love, but it is love gone wrong. It is love that has fallen away from the origin, which is, the perfect love of God. Perhaps the enlightened self-interest assumption of economics models

[11] Bonhoeffer, *London* 186-187.

[12] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 24.

[13] Georg Huntemann, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: An Evangelical Reassessment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993) 73.



is not enlightened enough. "It is self-satisfied...a love that is really hatred of God and my brother and sister, because they could only disturb me within the tight little circle I have drawn around myself. It has all the same power, the same passion, the same exclusiveness of real love—here or there. What is totally different is its goal—myself, rather than God and my neighbor."^[14]

Obligation and Liberation

Bonhoeffer was looking for concreteness in his discussion of the commandment of God.

In other words, how can God instruct mankind if His speech is not clear? "God's commandment, revealed in Jesus Christ, is always concrete speech to somebody.... It is always an address, a claim, and it is so comprehensive and at the same time so definite that it leaves no freedom for interpretation or application, but only the freedom to obey or to disobey."^[15] There are parts of Scripture in which the words of God are clear, for instance, in the Ten Commandments. Other parts of Scripture are not so clear. The commandment of God not only forbids; it obligates. It not only restricts, it sets us free to live as authentic human beings. However, there is another dynamic element involved in the commandment of God. Bonhoeffer speaks of the mandate of labor that God has given to all of humanity. This mandate places us in the modern world of business with Divine approval. We can move away from the life of doubting our vocation in business to a joyful certainty of living within the will of God.

How is this possible? "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat."^[16] "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."^[17] This is clear biblical instruction. These commands are not only negative, as if our work life were a feverish attempt not to break the eighth commandment; "Thou shalt not steal". These commands are positive in that they encourage us to live joyfully within the will of God, in this case the world of work and business. Business ethics here cooperates with other areas of life. This commandment gives fullness and wholeness to life. The complete expression of the commandment of God is revealed in Jesus Christ. "The commandment of God becomes the element in which one lives without always being conscious of it, and, thus it implies freedom of movement and of action, freedom from the fear

[14] Bonhoeffer, *London* 382.

[15] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* 275.

[16] 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

80 [17] Ephesians 4:28.



of decision, freedom from fear to act, it implies certainty, quietude, confidence, balance and peace.”[18]

The purpose of God’s commandment is liberty. It is permission. Since we are discussing business here, we have a development of the commandment of God concerning business. Beginning with the creation accounts to “dress and keep the garden,” the Ten Commandments of Exodus confront us with “Thou shalt not steal,” and “Thou shalt not covet.” The commandment continues through the Sermon on the Mount; “Give to those who ask you;” and the Pauline admonition “let him labor with his own hands.” God is placing us within this world of work. King Solomon would counsel us that for some it is possible to take joy in work. This also is a gift from God. This whole development leads us to the mandate of labor. It is possible to take joy in our work, in our business endeavors because we are operating within the will of God. This gives to us a certain surety and confidence in our work. There is a cooperation with God in what we are doing. Business ethics as such ceases to scrutinize every moment of the work day. It ceases to ask, “Are you making the best and highest use of your time in this activity?” The commandment of God in terms of labor allows a certain natural rhythm of the work day from clock-in, to the morning coffee break, to hard and frenetic activity, to lunch, to meetings, to the drive home. “The self-tormenting and hopeless question regarding the purity of one’s motives, the suspicious observation of oneself, the glaring and fatiguing light of incessant consciousness, all these have nothing to do with the commandment of God, who grants liberty to live and to act.”[19] Therefore, God desires freedom of action in the workday within the limits of His will.

The reality of God is the living reality. The revelation of God is the historical revelation of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit brings this reality to us every day. Since God is good, the reality of living in Christ will place us in “the good”. Good, here, is not a standard or a system, but a person. Rather than opposing my life to a standard of good, it is Christ Himself who is my life. What message or purpose Christ may wish to reveal in my life may not be clear to me, but I can have peace and contentment today knowing that Christ is my life. Therefore, the business life is also a context in which to live the Christ-life.

Bonhoeffer has been referred to as both a representative of Decalogue ethics and as a “Christ mystic.” Decalogue ethics refers to the emphasis on the clear speech of God as revealed in the Ten Commandments for example. Christ-mysticism refers to Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on the life of freedom in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. “Christ-mysticism means that the Christian takes part in the life and death and resurrection of Christ....Christ-mysticism does not, therefore, mean to discover a Christ in the depth of one’s soul. It means participation in the reality of the Christ who encounters me and takes me in tow, incorporat-

[18] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* 276.

81 [19] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* 279.



ing me into his reality.”[20] Christ-mysticism does not fly off into total subjectivism. There is a place in our discipleship for the clear speech of God, or a place for the concrete commandment, and so *Ethics* teaches. Our discipleship in business, then, includes the clear speech of God in the vagaries of the moment in which things may not be clear. We are learning Christ mystically through this process.

There are clear words of God for us as Bonhoeffer illustrates in *The Cost of Discipleship*. In the chapter on revenge, Bonhoeffer states, “By willing endurance we cause suffering to pass. Evil becomes a spent force when we put up no resistance. By refusing to pay back the enemy in his own coin, and by preferring to suffer without resistance, the Christian exhibits the sinfulness of contumely and insult.”[21] This is a comment on Matthew 5:39, “Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” We might differ from Bonhoeffer’s application of this passage, or possibly his exposition of its meaning. However, if we agree, then this teaching of Christ becomes applicable to our journey in business. For example, the CEO of a corporation who is also a disciple of Christ finds his business decisions informed by this teaching of Christ as well as other teaching.

I am not free to repay the evil doer in his own coin. In not resisting evil against me, I am exposing it. I am exhibiting it for what it is, and I am pulling its sting. This teaching is clear enough although difficult to do. However, there is another side of the coin which is the deliberate resisting of evil. The possible methods of resistance would be in view here also. The company employee might humbly discuss with his superior some subtle racial discrimination that exists in the firm. The disciple might call attention to a relaxing of accounting standards. This is the disciple’s journey—to perform these right actions at the appropriate times. Even clear teaching cannot provide the exact formula by which to gauge all of our actions.

Personal Formation as Business Ethics

It is life in the workplace that provides the opportunity for the Christian to be conformed into the image of Christ. Since much of my time is spent in the business organization, the formation of Christ in me must take place through my participation in business. Here, my action in business reveals and forms my ethics and becomes part of my formation for Christ or against Him. This may sound like the wrong way to discuss ethics. In this case we are emphasizing human action forming ethics. However, the disciple in business has no all-encompassing standard to impose on her fellow-workers. She may not have an all-en-

[20] Georg Huntemann, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: An Evangelical Reassessment* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993) 114-115.

82 [21] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* 142.



compassing standard to impose upon herself. "...Christ's disciples have no rights of their own or standards of right and wrong which they could enforce with other people; they have received nothing but Christ's fellowship. Therefore the disciple is not to sit in judgment over his fellow-man because he would wrongly usurp the jurisdiction."^[22] My "judgment" extends only as far as my authority in the business. I may be entrusted to make decisions of various types with respect to matériel or my fellow workers. Any spoken or insinuated "judgment" of persons beyond my authority is office gossip, rumor, officiousness, slander, or character assassination.

Formation takes us into the mystery of Christ and the mystery of other people. There is more involved in this formation than business calculations of less and more. Formation as business ethics takes me into the secret springs of human action. The disciples in business thusly formed will "...not hold themselves aloof from the processes of life as spectators, critics and judges; [but will] share in life not out of motive of 'shall' and 'should,' but from the full abundance of vital motives, from the natural and the organic, and from free acceptance and will, not in humourless hostility towards every vital force and towards every weakness and disorder."^[23] Simply to operate on the level of profit calculation is to miss the path of discipleship and the meaning of my actions.

However, to live without mystery means not to know anything about the secrets of our own lives or those of other people, or of the world's secrets. It means passing by that which is hidden within ourselves, other people, and the world, staying on the surface, taking the world seriously only to the extent to which it can be calculated and exploited, never looking for what is behind the world of calculation and of gain.^[24]

Business Ethics as Formation

Bonhoeffer is not an idealist. He is interested in discussing the concrete ethical action. So, in that tradition, business ethics seeks to help the follower of Christ in the day-to-day life in business. For Bonhoeffer the Christian understanding of the person at the most basic level is always the person in a social and ethical encounter with the other person; this is the Christian basic-relation of I and You, self and other. It presupposes the theological axiom that the human person always exists in relation to an Other, namely God, and that human

[22] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* 185.

[23] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* 265.

83 [24] Bonhoeffer, *London* 360.



relations are in some way analogies of this fundamental relation.[25] Since human beings are created in the image of God, all the people with whom I come into contact have a claim upon me. They may be part of the body of Christ, or they may be "enemies" for whom I must show love according to the teaching of Christ.

The claim of the 'other' upon me is a claim to treat that person with dignity, honesty, love and fair dealing and to treat the other as a bearer of the image of God and a brother of Christ. The claim of the other rests in God and God's work. My development also depends upon all these "others" with whom I interact. The individual, then, exists in relation to an 'other':[26]

Life in the business world develops character--for better or for worse. There is no exercising or controlling my will without the give and take of daily life. When we encounter other people, we encounter human beings with ideas, wills and abilities. In business competition or cooperation, we are placed in social situations in which we must make decisions and act. Our motives may be clear or not. All of this social 'dialectic' forms character. Through this interaction the business and the business person will be formed and shaped. Good businesses use ideas to improve performance. Indeed, our job may be to provide new ideas for experimentation and implementation in the business enterprise. However, Christ has another purpose for us in the business context. "It is not Christian men who shape the world with their ideas, but it is Christ who shapes men in conformity with Himself." [27]

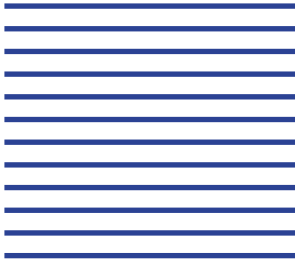
The road of ethical decision-making and wisdom in business is our road of discipleship. Our lack of clarity in ethical decisions should not make us despair or cause us to seek escape from the arena of business action. "The real man is at liberty to be his Creator's creature. To be conformed with the Incarnate is to have the right to be the man one really is. Now there is no more pretence, no more hypocrisy or self-violence, no more compulsion to be something other, better and more ideal than what one is. God loves the real man. God became a real man." [28] It is for this reason that we can be real men and women, and act with confidence. In speaking of business ethics as formation, we are asking the question, "How does Jesus Christ take form in our world?" Business provides the context for most of us. Business ethics as decision and action gets beyond theorizing and speculation. We will be formed as a result of our decisions and actions. Happily for us, there is a concrete place upon which we can stand which is the foundation of Christ Himself.

[25] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, DBWE Vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998) 50.

[26] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio* 51.

[27] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* 82.

84 [28] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* 82.



The Example of a Life

Bonhoeffer was not a businessperson. His character was formed through study, contemplation, action, reaction, dialogue, teaching, travel and suffering. Bonhoeffer saw his life as following a straight course from theologian to conspirator. While in Tegel prison in 1944 he wrote the following to Eberhard Bethge, his close friend.

I heard someone say yesterday that the last years had been completely wasted as far as he was concerned. I'm very glad that I have never yet had that feeling, even for a moment. Nor have I ever regretted my decision in the summer of 1939, for I'm firmly convinced—however strange it may seem—that my life has followed a straight and unbroken course, at any rate in its outward conduct. It has been an uninterrupted enrichment of experience, for which I can only be thankful.[29]

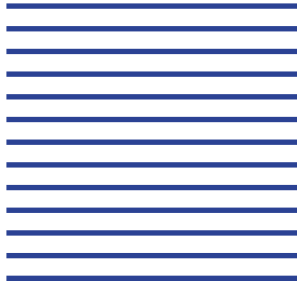
Was Bonhoeffer's increasing involvement in the conspiracy a result of the National Socialist atrocities against the Jews, or a defense of the gospel through the Confessing Church? The answer is both, yet his defense of the gospel began to take place outside of Confessing Church circles also. His radicalization increased as his disappointment with the Confessing Church increased. The incessant wrangling over the oath of allegiance to Hitler and the silence after the *Kristallnacht* (the night of broken glass) pogrom of November 9, 1938 caused Dietrich to distance himself from the Church.

Bonhoeffer's involvement in the conspiracy occurred at an unusual and horrific time in history. This would not be "normal" ethical action, therefore, we move into a discussion of the "borderline case" or the "boundary situation." In *Ethics* Bonhoeffer discussed the borderline case as the last resort in which the stakes are very high and normal reasoning has run out of alternatives. This case, says Bonhoeffer, moves into the area of the irrational, and for that reason the borderline case cannot be made into a rule, a norm, or a technique.[30]

Borderline cases in business ethics call for courageous action—possibly highly courageous action—say, in the case when one's life may be in danger. One hero in the recent sad litany of business ethics failures is Harry Markopolos, an independent financial fraud investigator. From May 2000 until April 2008 he submitted warning reports to the Securities and Exchange Commission that Bernard Madoff was running a gigantic Ponzi scheme. The SEC turned a deaf ear, but Mr. Markopolos persisted in his investigation even though he was in fear for his life. This would be Bonhoeffer's borderline case. Harming one's life cannot be made into a rule, but a person might do it to demonstrate the reality of God living through himself.

[29] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997) 272.

[30] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* DBWE Vol. 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 273.



Joachim von Soosten in the editor's afterword to the German edition of *Sanctorum Communio* uses the phrase "vicarious representative action" to describe Bonhoeffer's journey toward the resistance against Hitler. "The church exists for others," and "The man for others," were typical phrases of Bonhoeffer's theology. The disciple of Christ acts as a representative for Christ in action toward others. In prison this line of thought became more identified with a radical theology of the cross, i.e. vicariously representing Christ's suffering on the cross. As Dietrich stated, "It is the most radical expression of the idea that God's truth, although already real, can and even must become true only in the reality of the world through the witness of persons who in vicarious representative action mutually stand-up-for-each-other. Only thus can this truth be expressed 'nonreligiously.'"^[31] Bonhoeffer's famous "non-religious interpretation" of Christianity centers around Christology—the study of Christ, "the man for others." This is essentially living out the Christ life, and this was Bonhoeffer's ethical action in the crisis. Perhaps this "nonreligious" living of Christian faith can result in courage to do the right thing in all our business endeavors.

Applying Bonhoeffer's life and work to the study of business ethics specifically, breaks some new ground in Bonhoeffer studies. A recently published book on this topic which may be consulted is *Bonhoeffer and Business Ethics*^[32]. Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* has been used as a springboard for other works on ethics by other thinkers. Shortly after Bonhoeffer's death, John A. T. Robinson wrote *Honest to God*,^[33] and Joseph Fletcher wrote *Situation Ethics*,^[34] both claiming Bonhoeffer's work as an inspiration. Situation ethics is associated with the position that the person should simply act according to the demands of the moment or the situation without regarding principle or prior commitment. Bonhoeffer's was a more nuanced position particularly with his emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount and on "Decalogue ethics"^[35] while maintaining freedom and autonomy of action for the believer.^[36]

Many other works have continued Bonhoeffer's influence on ethics. Particularly to be noted here is the webpage of the International Bonhoeffer Society

[31] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio* DBWE Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) 304.

[32] Walton Padelford, *Bonhoeffer and Business Ethics* (BorderStone Press, Mountain Home, AR, 2011).

[33] John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1963) 105-121.

[34] Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics* (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1966) 55.

[35] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment: 1940 – 1945*, DBWE 16 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006) 662-663.

[36] Sabine Damm, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an Introduction to His Thought*, tr. By Thomas Rice (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007) 101.



which can be accessed at <http://dietchbonhoeffer.org/>. On this webpage is found a scholarship icon which will allow the reader to access the truly huge scholarly output that continues to grow as a result of Bonhoeffer's life and work. Listed in the bibliography in numerical order is the entire corpus of Bonhoeffer's work published by Fortress Press. This is the definitive edition of Bonhoeffer's work translated into English under the auspices of the International Bonhoeffer Society. The English translation is done from the German edition known as *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*. There are also some other editions of Bonhoeffer's works that are listed as well.

Bibliography

Bethge, Eberhard, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*. Edited by Victoria J. Barnett. Translated By Eric Mosbacher, Peter and Betty Ross, Frank Clarke, and William Glen-Doepel under Editorship of Edwin Robertson. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

Bethge, Eberhard, Renate Bethge, and Christian Gremmels, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Life in Pictures*. Translated by John Bowden. London: SCM Press, 1986.

DBWE stands for Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English edition, translated from *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* the definitive edition of Bonhoeffer's writings published in Germany by Chr. Kaiser Verlag and edited by Eberhard Bethge. The translation project of these works into English is occurring under the auspices of the International Bonhoeffer Society. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., General Editor. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996-.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Sanctorum Communio*. DBWE Vol. 1. Edited by Clifford Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

_____. *Act and Being*. DBWE Vol. 2. Edited by Wayned Whitson Floyd, Jr. Translated by H. Martin Rumscheidt. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

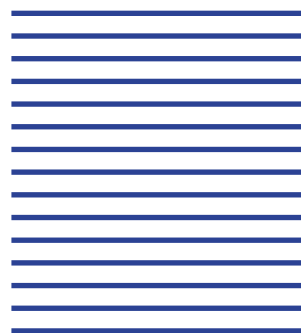
_____. *Creation and Fall*. DBWE Vol. 3. Edited by John W. de Gruchy. Translated by Douglas Stephen Bax. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

_____. *Discipleship*. DBWE Vol. 4. Edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey. Translated by Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

_____. *Life Together: Prayerbook of the Bible, An Introduction to the Psalms*. DBWE Vol. 5. Edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly. Translated by Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

_____. *Ethics*. DBWE Vol. 6. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

_____. *Fiction from Tegel Prison*. DBWE Vol. 7. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Nancy Lukens. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.



_____. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. DBWE Vol. 8. Edited by John W. de Gruchy. Translated by Isabel Best, Lisa E. Dahill, Reinhard Krauss, and Nancy Lukens. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

_____. *The Young Bonhoeffer, 1918-1927*. DBWE Vol. 9. Edited by Paul Duane Matheny, Clifford J. Green and Marshall D. Johnson. Translated by Mary C. Nebelsick and Douglas W. Stott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

_____. *Barcelona, Berlin, New York, 1928-1931*. DBWE Vol. 10. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Douglas W. Stott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

_____. *Ecumenical, Academic and Pastoral Work: 1931-1932*. DBWE Vol. 11. Edited by Victoria Barnett, Mark Brocker, and Michael Lukens. Translated by Isabel Best, Nicholas Humphrey, Marion Pauck, Anne Schmidt-Lange, and Douglas Scott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

_____. *Berlin: 1932-1933*. DBWE Vol. 12. Edited by Larry L. Rasmussen. Translated by Isabel Best and David Higgins. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

_____. *London, 1933-1935*. DBWE Vol. 13. Edited by Keith Clements. Translated by Isabel Best. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

_____. *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935-1937*. DBWE Vol. 14. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Pending.

_____. *Theological Education Underground: 1937-1940*. DBWE Vol. 15. Edited by Victoria Barnett. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

_____. *Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940-1945*. DBWE Vol. 16. Edited by Mark S. Brocker. Translated by Lisa E. Dahill, supplementary material by Douglas W. Stott. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

_____. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Translated by R.H. Fuller. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

_____. *Ethics*. Translated by Neville Horton Smith. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

_____. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Translated by Reginald Fuller and Frank Clark. N. York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Memories and Perspectives, Trinity Films, 1983.

Dramm, Sabine. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, An Introduction to His Thought*. Translated by Thomas Rice. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2007.

Fletcher, Joseph. *Situation Ethics*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966.

Huntemann, Georg. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: An Evangelical Reassessment*. Translated by Todd Huizinga. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996.

Padelford, Walton. *Bonhoeffer and Business Ethics*. Mountain Home, AR: Borderstone Press. 2011.

Robinson, John A.T. *Honest to God*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963.

Schumacher, E.F. *Small Is Beautiful*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

Wind, Renate, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer; A spoke in the Wheel*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998.