Saint Bonhoeffer?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Paradox of Sainthood

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"Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed that easily."
Dorothy Day (founder of the Catholic Worker movement)

The Moral Saint – and why you should not want to be one

Saints are not very popular in modern ethical theory. Susan Wolf's 1982 article on the subject is already a classic. She argues that 'moral perfection, in the sense of moral saintliness, (does) not constitute a model of personal well-being toward which it would be particularly rational or good or desirable for a human being to strive.'[1] 'Moral saints', according to Wolf, are not attractive examples to be followed. In their monomaniacal pursuit of moral perfection, for which they set aside everything, they are dull and tiresome company. They are nice, only nice. But there's no question of laughing with them at a risqué joke or a 'borderline' sarcastic remark. Besides it is questionable whether it is good from the point of view of morality to only want to be 'good'. After all non-moral virtues are also part of the good life that is pursued in ethics. If one only wants to be good in the moral sense of the word, one will never be able to become an Olympic swimmer, a concert pianist, or a successful scientist. If one only wants to be good, one will never be able to perfect one's backhand or curl up with a good book solely because is gives pleasure to oneself – and to nobody else.
For that reason wanting to become a saint is not a good ideal, even though it is a good thing that some are. After all, an ideal person is also supposed to have non-moral qualities that cannot be developed but at the expense of paying attention to others.
In this connection, however, we are more interested in the image of the saint that Wolf presupposes than in her line of reasoning. The saint is the radical altruist, who unconditionally renders his life at the service of others. S/he is the moral fanatic, who sacrifices him/herself and his/her concerns in the interest of the other. Either out of Love (the Loving Saint, who in accordance with utilitarianism can only be happy if everybody else is too), or out of a sense of duty (the Rational Saint, who following Kant, on the basis of rational insight considers one's own wishes and preferences to be subordinate to a higher more rational desire: the well-being of all), he pursues moral perfection. He believes it is better to always be morally better.

[1] Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints', in: The Journal of Philosophy 8 (August 1982), 419 – 439. I am quoting a version that is available on the internet: http://www.belmont.edu/Humanities/Philosophy./courses/philinquiryf98/msaints.html

Edith Wyschogrod is more positive than Wolf about holiness in her *Saints and Postmodernism*. While Wolf evaluates holiness from the point of view of ethical theory, Wyschogrod actually does the opposite: she wants to show how the stories of saints and saints' lives (hagiographies) have an appealing moral power that is absent in modern ethical theory. The backbone of modern ethics is formed by moral reasoning modeled after the way theories are put together in contemporary natural sciences. But compared to the impact that stories have on their hearers and readers, modern ethical theory has no power at all. It does not change us, does not make us into other people. Hagiographies do do that. They have 'imperative power.'[2] With her plea for narrativity as a medium for morality, Wyschogrod's supports a postmodern tack in moral philosophy. The postmodern thematization of the excessive (cf. Bataille), the openness for the other (alterity), the inexpressibility of singularity (*individuum ineffabile*), the aesthetics of the body as a means of communication – all these create room for a more positive evaluation of the figure of the saint. For Wyschogrod saints are people that are completely available to the other, in the moral sense of the word. They are exceptional people who, because of their extraordinary sensitivity to others, can be regarded as the virtuosos of the moral life. (150) They are the 'native speakers of the language of alterity, poets of the imperative'. (183) The saint does not worry about the cohesion of his own self. 'The saint is the one who is totally at the disposal of the Other, and lives this exposure as response to the Other by stripping the self of its egoity or formal unity.' (98) They erase themselves to the point of disappearance.
The story of the life of a saint, a hagiography, does something with its readers and hearers. It cannot be read as a particular instance of a general theory. The saint is unfit to be subjected to the Kantian universalization test - in that sense Wyschogrod agrees with Susan Wolf. But a hagiography is read rather like a musical score. It has a non-verbal pedagogy. Its moral cogency is esthetical. In this connection understanding means to want to 'perform' such a life oneself, from a reader to want to become a writer of a bio/hagiography oneself. Saints are no illustration of what compassion is about. Rather in all their inexpressible singularity they are a sign of what cannot be said. They signify 'compassion'. (152v., 254) Wyschogrod exposes the reason why modern ethics wants no part in the 'saintly' excessive openness for others. The social philosophy, on which it rests, is a form of cynicism at heart. It is based on self-interest as the basic social ethic, of which altruism must remain a strange violation, an exception. Are saints boring unattractive beings that spoil every party?(Wolf) Not at all. We actually badly need saints and their hagiographies to continue to know what is human, depending on and appealing to others. They play an important role in the pedagogy toward humaneness.

For Susan Wolf the saint is a *moral* saint. Though Wyschogrod's approach is quite different, the saint for her is in fact also a *moral* virtuoso. To be sure she has an eye – more than Wolf – for the religious background that accompanies sainthood most of the time. Yet she wishes to make a categorical distinction between religion and morality. She keeps both strictly separated by reserving the term saint – with Susan Wolf – exclusively for the radical altruist, and the

[2] Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*. Revisioning Moral Philosophy, The University of Chicago, Chicago and London 1990. She describes hagiography as 'a narrative linguistic practice that reconstructs the lives of the saints so that the reader or hearer can experience their imperative power.' (6)

religious excess for the mystic. The saint is 'the one whose adult life in its entirety is devoted to the alleviation of sorrow (psychological suffering) and pain (physical suffering) that afflicts sentient beings, whatever the cost to the saint in pain or sorrow.'[3] Historically the mystic and the saint are often united in one person. Yet for Wyschogrod the mystical aspect of experience is 'functionally distinct', and therefore 'may be separated' from the radical altruism that constitutes the practice of the saint.[4] This semantic decision then gives Wyschogrod the right to completely disregard the religious motif in sainthood.

Sainthood: 'An essentially religious phenomenon'

In this limitation of sainthood to the moral domain we run into a curious secular restriction of the perspective. In this connection the philosopher of religion Robert Merrihaw Adams wrote a telling critique of Wolf's article. He finds that in it religion is in fact conspicuous by its absence. His criticism applies mutatis mutandis to Wyschogrod as well. Adams observes that those we generally consider to be saints (like Gandhi and St. Francis of Assisi) in reality look quite differently from Wolf's 'moral saints'. Saints often aren't nice at all, but they are frequently harsh (for themselves and for others), controversial and unbearable. They know joys that are meant only for them. And often they are indeed uncomfortable, but seldom dull company. But Wolf assesses sainthood from a moral point of view exclusively. She writes: 'By moral saint I mean a person whose every action is as morally good as possible'. And for her morality has 'exclusively to do with one's regard for the good (and perhaps she would add, the rights of other persons)'.[5]
For Adams on the other hand sainthood is 'an essentially religious phenomenon'. Saints are not ambitious pursuers of moral perfection. They are rather– at least this is what they themselves often say – virtuosos in receptivity that surrender to an endless source of divine goodness. The central feature of sainthood must be sought – in theistic religions in any case – in the relationship that saints have with God. Adams wants to recognize the etymological connection between the saints and the holy. 'Saints are people in whom the holy or divine can be seen.'[6] 'In a religious view they are people who submit themselves, in faith, to God, not only loving him but also letting his love possess them, so that it works through them and shines through them to other people. What interests a saint may have will then depend on what interests God has, for sainthood is a participation in God's interests.'(ibid.). Based on this *religious* definition of sainthood one can also call Fra Angelico, Johann Sebastian Bach and Thomas Aquinas saints and one can understand why Albert

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[3] Op. cit. 34, cf. also 58: the saint as 'radical altruist who is dedicated to the alleviation of the suffering of others irrespective of the cost to herself/himself.'
[4] Ibid., 39f.
[5] Robert Merrihaw Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford 1987, 164 – 173, 167. Wolf: 'Moral evaluation is focused primarily on features of a person's life over which that person has control; it is largely restricted to aspects of his life which are likely to have considerable effect on other people.' (p. 10) Wolf wants to limit the definition of what is moral, because if one expands the description of the 'good life' too much – so that even self-realization fits it – one can understand it to mean anything, and hence nothing. One then in fact no longer says anything meaningful if one calls Mother Theresa 'good'.
[6] Adams, op. cit. 170.

Schweitzer kept a piano in the jungle of Lambarene. Religion is richer than morality, because its divine object is so rich. God is not only a commander of morals, he is also a lover of beauty. If one makes morality one's highest goal in life, one commits idolatry from a religious point of view. Morality then becomes one's religion.[7] Must we all have the desire to become saints? Not if we understand sainthood to be about moral perfection. Although, 'there could be more Gandhi than there are, and it would be a very good thing if there were.'(169)[8] But if we adhere to a broad conception of sainthood, more and other personal ideals, virtues and talents will fit into it.

I think that Robert Adams is right and that we must hold on to his argument that sainthood is 'an essentially religious phenomenon'. 'What makes them saints is not their moral perfection, but the larger vision out of which they live. [9] That vision does not even need to be explicitly articulated. The central element in it is the surrender of the self to God. 'Saints' are those **people that relocate the center of their self in God and want to allow their lives to be completely and without reservation determined by the influence of this formative vision of their identity.** They no longer find the center of their lives within themselves but outside of themselves. Not only do they consider themselves to be absolutely dependent on God (for Schleiermacher this is characteristic of the religious virtuoso), but they let themselves be totally and unconditionally determined by this faith in their way of life. In all this they do not seek martyrdom, but neither do they avoid it.

So a saint is not a Sisyphus, who wants to complete an endless task, but someone who has surrendered him/herself. Saints dedicate their lives to a power that is greater and stronger than they are. They experience this power as the source of the good. 'The saint is not so much a poet of the imperative as of alterity', says Grant in a variation on Wyschogrod while at the same time correcting her.[10]

> In his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* William James describes a phenomenology of the saint from an empirical point of view that has become classical. He too comes to the same outline of the saint. He finds that 'charity' certainly belongs to the essential characteristics of the life of a saint, regardless of the religious tradition in which s/he lives. 'The saint loves his enemies, and treats loathsome beggars as his brothers'. 'The saints are authors, auctores, increasers of goodness'.[11] But saints are more than altruists. They are also ascetics and mystics, e.g.. And sometimes according to James – and he points to Theresa of Avila – a saint is but one of the two and surrenders to the divine without compassion to others.[12] For James too the deepest motive of the saint is situated in his religious devotion. His dedication to others is derived from this. The relocation of the inner personal center, the experience to be part of a larger whole, the 'surrender to the larger power' is central in the notion of sainthood, however differently this may be expressed in different religious traditions. This act of surrender, this letting go of oneself, 'is the fundamental act in specifically religious, as distinguished from moral

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[7] Ibid., 172.
[8] Ibid., 172.
[9] Cf. Colin Grant*, Altruism and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge University Press Cambridge 2001, 241.
[10] Grant, op. cit. 240.
[11] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York 1978 (Gifford Lectures 1901-1902), 275, 351 resp.. Without their 'tender grace' the world would be unfit to live in. As torchbearers of faith in 'the essential sacredness of everyone', they occupy an essential spot in the moral evolution of humanity. The saint is 'an effective ferment of goodness, a slow transmutor of the earthly into a more heavenly order.' (op. cit. 354)
[12] Ibid., 342f.

practice' according to James. And what is remarkable in that this deed is rarely an active effort, but rather a passive allowing to happen. 'It so often comes about, not by doing, but by simply relaxing and throwing the burden down.'[13] A saint is someone who barely says 'no, no' any more. What he denies himself also arises out of a fundamental yes that is rooted in a religious surrender to a transcendent reality or power that encompasses him.

A saint for the needs of our time

Here I want to look at Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a modern day saint. More precisely, with his biography and theology I want to illustrate, what it means to be one, though not wanting to be one. For theological reasons Protestantism is rather skeptical about saints among themselves. Bonhoeffer himself shared that skepticism. We shall see that he was never interested in regarding *sainthood as a personal goal of life*. The Lutheran Bonhoeffer situated the doctrine of sanctification within the simul justus et peccator of the doctrine of justification. Under no circumstance did he want it to become independent, so that it would run off under the cover of the merciful judgement of God. But at the same time one can observe that Bonhoeffer like no other struggled with the issue of sainthood. In prison he admits that he has even entertained the thought for a while to want to become a saint.
And *did* he not become one in the end?
Luther sharply criticized the cult of the saints (dass 'sich die Leute gewöhnen, mehr Zuversicht auf die Heiligen zu setzen als auf Christus selbst'[that people get used to putting more faith in the saints than in Christ himself]). Yet this does not stop protestants from remembering their saints as well – to 'strengthen their faith' and as 'an example of good works'.[14] In my opinion Bonhoeffer was one of them. In various protestant 'saint's calendars' April 10th (the day on which Bonhoeffer was executed in 1945) is dedicated to him (e.g. *James Kiefer's Christian Biographies; Ökumenisches Heiligenlexikon*).[15] A statue of Bonhoeffer was unveiled among nine other modern day martyrs in the western

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[13] Ibid., 289.

[14] The Augsburgs Confession (1530) articulates in art. 21 (**Vom Dienst der Heiligen),** 'dass man der Heiligen gedenken soll, damit wir unseren Glauben stärken, wenn wir sehen, wie ihnen Gnade widerfahren und auch wie ihnen durch den Glauben geholfen worden ist; außerdem soll man sich an ihren guten Werken ein Beispiel nehmen, ein jeder in seinem Beruf . . . Aus der Heiligen Schrift kann man aber nicht beweisen, dass man die Heiligen anrufen oder Hilfe bei ihnen suchen soll. 'Denn es ist nur ein einziger Versöhner und Mittler gesetzt zwischen Gott und den Menschen, Jesus Christus.' (1. Timotheusbrief 2,5).'

[15] See http://www.heiligenlexikon.de and http://elvis.rowan.edu/~kilroy/JEK (James Kiefer's Christian Biographies) The following prayer of intercession can be found there: 'Gracious God, the Beyond in the midst of our life, who gave grace to your servant Dietrich Bonhoeffer to know and teach the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, and to bear the cost of following him: Grant that we, strengthened by his teaching and example, may receive your word and embrace its call with an undivided heart; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. O God our Father, the source of strength to all your saints, who brought your servant Dietrich Bonhoeffer through imprisonment and death to the joys of life eternal: Grant that we, being encouraged by their examples, may hold fast the faith that we profess, and that we may seek to know, and according to our knowledge to do, your will, even unto death; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.'

main entrance of Westminster Abbey on July 9th, 1998.[16] Because of his share in a successful attempt to get a group of 14 Jews to safety via Switzerland (the so-called 'Unternehmen 7'), efforts are under way to 'canonize' him as one of the 'righteous' of Yad Vashem. Bonhoeffer is among the modern witnesses of the faith that appear as a modern saint in school books and catechetical materials alongside Albert Schweitzer, Ghandi, Martin Luther King. In addition cannot much of the theological literature devoted to Bonhoeffer be regarded as hagiography in Wyschogrod's sense? Bethge's biography is more than a historical reconstruction too. After all the book can also be read as 'a narrative linguistic practice that reconstructs the lives of the saints so that the reader or hearer can experience their imperative power.' Consequently it cannot be put in the same category as, e.g., Busch's biography of Barth. Hagiographies, Wyschogrod writes, have a clear strategic goal: they put a moral claim on their addressees, so that they may feel themselves impelled to "make the saint's movements" after him or her. In the same way, I think, reading Bethge's biography should not leave you unchanged.

Bonhoeffer as a saint. Why should we do this? I go along with Robert Ellsberg in his plea to take 'saints seriously for the needs of our time'. Besides Oscar Romero, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, Albert Schweitzer, John Wesley, his 'cloud of witnesses' (Hebr. 12:1-2) -of course- also includes Bonhoeffer [17]
Ellsberg quotes Karl Rahner: saints 'are the initiators and the creative models of the holiness which happens to be right for, and is the task of, their particular age. They create a new style; they prove that a certain form of life and activity is a really genuine possibility; they show experimentally that one can be a Christian even in "this" way.' Ellsberg continues: 'Saints are those who in some partial way, embody – literally incarnate – the challenge of faith in their time and place. In doing so, they open a path that others might follow.'
Why do we need saints? Along the lines of Wyschogrod Ellsberg dispenses with the isolated individual of ethical theory in favor of a narrative ethics. 'We are formed by what we admire. But it is possible to cultivate one's taste in this regard as in any other pursuit. It is important to learn how to recognize what is good, to train our ears to discern the truth, to pay honor to what is truly honorable, to choose a moral standard that lies beyond our easy grasp.'
How are we to learn these things? Did anyone ever become better from reading a handbook on ethics? Yet most of us, at one time or another, have felt our hearts respond to an example of courage, goodness, or spiritual nobility, that inspired us to a higher path. (…) I can truthfully say of my own life that I have learned far less about the gospel from studying theology than I have from the lives of holy people. In part this reflects the narrative structure of the Christian gospel. The truths of Christianity are verified in living witness rather than in logical syllogisms.'
But we need other saints now than we used to. The church canon is of no help here. 'Today it is not nearly enough merely to be a saint', Simone Weil wrote, ' but we must have the saintliness demanded by the present moment....' What

[16] Alongside a.o. Maximilian Kolbe, Martin Luther King jr. and Oscar Romero. See http://www.dbonhoeffer.org/westmstr.htm

[17] Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* Orbis Books in Maryknoll, New York. I quote http://www.sojourners.com/soj9709/970921.html (*Sojourners Online, Sojourners, September-October 1997, Vol. 26, No. 5)*

are the needs of the present moment? With Ellsberg I think that previous models of sanctity often tended to emphasize a world-denying asceticism; today we need examples of discipline and self-denial that serve the world and display solidarity with a suffering humanity. The traditional list of saints has been dominated by the clergy and those in religious life; we need to give special attention to the witness of lay people—those whose vocation it is to infuse the 'world' with the spirit of the gospel. We need examples of holiness beyond the cloister: saints immersed in the worlds of art, literature, scholarship, in political struggle, and in everyday life.

We need saints for our time. There are religious reasons for this. If it is true that God is increasingly being experienced as the absent one, it is saints that make Him be present or at least keep the desire for Him alive. As Cardinal Suhard observed, to be a saint means 'to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist.'[18]

But apart from religious motives there are also moral reasons for needing saints, masters of the spiritual and moral life. We live in a time in which more and more people can and must shape their own individual lives. Traditional ways of life, including that of the church and of middle-class morality, have fallen away as pre-existent frameworks. The moral and religious center of gravity has shifted away from objective institutions and toward subjective decisions. One can no longer evade the question, What kind of person do I want to be? The modern, enlightened answer to that question, an autonomous person, is at most the beginning of an answer. For the question regarding the good life cannot be answered by the Kantian universalization test. It is different for each of us. People are not all the same. Each one of us is special and lives within a network of unique relationships. In this network we are saints or sinners, heroes or cowards. In it we fail or succeed. What's more people function as models or anti-models for one another within those social networks. Contemporary liberal individualism blinds us to that kind of practical mimesis out of which we erect our moral reality. We imitate one another and are each other's models and rivals (Girard). Once we recognize this basic anthropological given, the question whether we should have examples becomes meaningless. We have them. The issue is: what are our examples. Who are our heroes, our saints?

Trying to live a holy life…

St. Bonhoeffer might be one of them. If anything qualifies him for this part, it is his obvious religious devotion and piety, his personal discipline and asceticism, the way he put his life at the service of others. In retrospect, his decision to return to Germany from the USA in June of 1939 was a crucial moment in this regard. Without that dramatic moment Bonhoeffer would have entered history as a coward, as an opportunist at best, but not as a saint and martyr. But when one reads his diaries from that time one realizes how little it is a matter of a 'decision' in the sense of a rational weighing of pros and cons. It is much more like he surrenders to a power that is stronger than himself and in the end cannot say no to it. 'I made a mistake in coming to America, ' he writes to Reinhold Niebuhr in July 1939. 'I must live through this difficult period of our own national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I

[18] Ellsberg, op. cit.

do not share the trials of this time with my people.' (TF 479)[19] A decision that in the end involved the possibility of martyrdom. Bonhoeffer has the classical characteristics of a saint: asceticism, strength of soul, purity, charity.[20] But in addition he qualifies as a *modern* saint, as his prison letters testify. Worldly, intensely oriented toward the 'Diesseitige'. Hanged as a pastor, but because of his participation in *political* resistance. To be imitated because of his piety, but also because of his courage.
Bonhoeffer – a saint for our times. But at the same time a saint that didn't want to be a saint at all. A saint, who described the pursuit of special holiness as being characteristic of true Christians as a pathological form of conceitedness (DBW 14, 964 (Bibelarbeit zu den Timotheusbriefen, 1936) and quoted Luther (apocryphally?) as saying: 'Heraus aus der Kirche wer ein Heiliger sein will.' (DBW 13, 401, sermon on 1 Cor. 13,13; 4.11.1934). A saint who called the ambition to be a saint a temptation of the devil. After all Jesus did not call saints but sinners to himself. 'Therefore we should prefer to be sinners in order to be with Jesus, than to want to become a saint with the devil.' (ibid., 402v.) Apparently Bonhoeffer had a complex love-hate relationship with the phenomenon of sainthood. On the one hand he felt the attraction of a holy life, so that he in fact lived it. On the other hand holiness was repugnant to him and he had his reasons for that too. Does this ambivalent attitude point to contradiction or inconsistency? Or is it an expression of a paradox that is part and parcel of sainthood itself as a model of life. I believe the latter is true, and in what follows I will try to use Bonhoeffer to illustrate this. Only the saint that doesn't want to be one will perhaps – we are talking about a necessary, not a sufficient condition! – become one.

The letter he wrote to Bethge on the day after the abortive attack on Hitler, July 20th, 1944, will serve as the central text for our theme. It contains an evaluative review of Bonhoeffer's active existence, which gains a dramatic charge against the background of the realization that his chances of survival have become minimal. The letter is a kind of religious autobiography. First I quote it at length, and then I use it as a basis for the rest of my analysis.

Bonhoeffer writes:
'During the last year or so I've come to know and understand more and more the profound this-worldliness of Christianity. The Christian is not a *homo religiosus*, but simply a human, as Jesus was human – in contrast, shall we say, to John the Baptist.' …
In this context Bonhoeffer brings back to mind a conversation with a young French pastor, the pacifist and peace activist Jean Laserre that he had met 13 years earlier in the US.
'We were asking ourselves quite simply **what we wanted to do with our lives.** He said he would like to **become a saint** (and I think it's quite likely that he did become one). **At the time I was very impressed, but I disagreed with him**, and said, in effect, that I should like to learn **to have faith**. For a long time I didn't realize the depth of the contrast. **I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life**, or something like that. I suppose I wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* at the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote.

[19] References to Bonhoeffer's work are given in the text. For the abbreviations used, see the end of the article.
[20] James, op. cit. 275.

I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of one self, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous person or an unrighteous one, a sick person or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we **throw ourselves completely into the arms of God,** taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is *metanoia*; and that is how one becomes human and a Christian (cf. Jer. 45!).' WEN 401v. ; TF 509f., emphasis mine)
A few days before this he had also written about holiness as a goal of life, at that time in a more general way. In the letter of July 21st he applies what he said then to his own biography entirely. 'To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, **to make something of oneself** (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be a person – not a type of person, but the person that Christ creates in us. It is **not the religious act** that makes the Christian, but **participation in the sufferings of God** in the secular life. That is *metanoia…*' (Letter from July 18, 1944, TF 509, emphasis mine).

Sanctorum Communio

In his retrospective the period that began with Bonhoeffer's stay in the US and ends with *The Cost of Discipleship* – now in the English edition of the Works: *Discipleship* – apparently plays a fundamental part. That was the period in which he was impressed by Laserre, who wanted to become a saint. And even if he disagreed with him, by putting faith over against or above holiness he thought he himself would be able to master faith 'by trying to live a holy life' ['so etwas wie ein heiliges Leben zu führen.']. Bonhoeffer takes leave of this phase in his life without abandoning the view of faith that he developed in *Discipleship*. This sentence: 'Today I can see the dangers of that book, **though I still stand by what I wrote**', renders it impossible to regard the period of *Discipleship* as a dead end sidetrack on his way from 'church' to 'world' in the eyes of the later Bonhoeffer (Hanfried Müller). It rather argues for answering the question about 'continuity/discontinuity' in the development of Bonhoeffer's theology – with Von Weizsäcker – more dialectically, in terms of a 'breakthrough' of insights that reach maturity. Deepening and enrichment in stead of break and farewell.[21] The prison theology integrates the doctrine of sanctification that Bonhoeffer unfolds in *Discipleship* in a new conceptual framework, it does not eliminate it.

Bonhoeffer regards *Discipleship* as the end of the phase in his development in which he tried to lead 'something resembling a holy life.' How did he get to this and what are we supposed to think of? For the brilliant young theologian, who wrote *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, sainthood as a goal of life seems far away. His dissertation, to be sure, is about the church as a community of saints (Bonhoeffer reads 'sancti', not the more catholic 'sancta') (SC 77, cf. 248 note), but for him holiness is not an independent theme. He rejects Max

[21] Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, Gedanken eines Nichttheologen zur theologische Entwicklung Dietrich Bonhoeffers', in Hans Pfeifer (ed.), Genf 76. Ein Bonhoeffer-Symposion, Chr. Kaiser München 1976, 29 –50, 43.

Scheler's metaphysical ethics, which develops a typology of values in which the saint represents the highest ethical value. (DBW 1, 81ff.) One also searches the indexes in vain for the name of R. Otto and his *Das Heilige.* For Bonhoeffer holiness is not a relevant category in the history of religion. For the Lutheran systematic theologian that he is, holiness does not stand over against the sacral but over against sin. In addition Bonhoeffer's theme is not the religion of the individual, but the social quality of the church as community.
Why church? From his teacher, the Luther expert Karl Holl, he adopts the intrinsic connection between the doctrine of justification and ecclesiology that the latter had discovered with Luther.[22] Bonhoeffer becomes convinced of 'the social intention of all the basic Christian concepts.' (DBW 1, 21(Preface)) From his other teacher and Ph.D. supervisor, Reinhold Seeberg, he borrows the methodological decision that theology does not have its starting point in an ideal reality, but in revelation. For the young Bonhoeffer sainthood can thus not be understood in any way except in terms of sanctification: the flip-side of the justification that becomes visible and is given in a real sense (revealed) in the church. That does not mean that the saints in the church become perfect people. Regarded from the point of view of simul justus et peccator the church remains fully communio peccatorum. What distinguishes the church as a social community, Bonhoeffer reads in Augustin, is the fact that in this community the sins are being *forgiven*. (DBW 1,123, note1)
Sanctification is renewal of life, actualization of the salvation realized in Christ. It is not actualized individually in the moral or religious perfection of the individual, but socially and relationally in (a key notion in SC) vicarious representative action. In the communion of the saints one person vouches for the other, one person becomes Christ to the other, just like Christ vouched for us. 'Christ existing as church-community,' is the term borrowed from Hegel that Bonhoeffer coins for this. But this reality, however real, is yet only given as an eschatological preview. We *believe* our holiness. After all, 'Those who are justified have trouble with even the very first steps of the new life'. (213) In this world the justified is never holy without being guilty. Yet in his guilt he is a saint, because he stands in the community of the church in which Christ vicariously forgives his guilt. (ibid.)
Actuality and reality of human holiness harshly contradict each other. The church throughout history is ecclesia militans, not triumphans. 'Every misunderstanding of this idea of earliest Christianity has always led to a sectarian ideal of holiness in the process of building the Realm of God on earth.' (DBW 1, 138, note).

Sanctification as a subdivision of the Lutheran doctrine of justification; the individual appropriation of salvation in and only in the community of the church – for Bonhoeffer the saint is not an independent theme yet, or a beckoning prospect. Still there are a number of elements in SC that lay the foundation for the attraction that the theme will have for him at the time of Discipleship. From R. Seeberg he does not only adopt the starting point in revelation, but also the emphasis on its development and positiveness in history, 'in the sense that it grows to perfection' (DBW 1, 211, cf. Afterword 296). For Bonhoeffer revelation is real, concrete, social – and therefore – as he phrases it in *Act and Being,* ''haveable' in the Church'. (DBW 2, 91) For him the flight into the 'invisible church' is a form of docetism. A basic intuition that is there

[22] 'Holl's study "The Origin of Luther's Concept of the Church" is based on this central thesis.' (Joachim von Soosten, Afterword DBW 1, 293).

in his entire work is already visible in SC: 'Bonhoeffer's theology is informed by the conviction that the truth which is believed, must have a concrete locus within the reality of the world.' (DBW 1, Afterword, 291) It is tangible as the church. The later reproach of ecclesiological positivism (M. Honecker) on the part of Bonhoeffer is not entirely unjustified. In an analogous way Barth talked of catholisizing tendencies in Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology (*Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/2, 725, KD IV/3, 863ff., cf. DBW 1 Afterword, 302). But while Bonhoeffer does emphatically distance himself from the Roman Catholic position in SC ('There is no sociological structure that is holy as such.' (DBW 1, 269), he keeps the door ajar towards the radical reformation. He considers the distinction between church and sect in the typology of Weber-Troeltsch untenable. In spite of the exaggerated attention paid to conversion and personal holiness in that tradition, it is nevertheless true that 'striving to attain the true church and pure doctrine is inherently necessary.' (DBW 1,271) The church as a church of the people (centered around baptism) is simply asking for a church of volunteers, a Communion church of those that 'mit Ernst Christ sein wollen' (Luther). (DBW 1, 220f.).
Therefore, even though all the saints equally stand before God as sinners that need justification, there are distinctions. The church has some who are strong, and some who are weak, 'some who are honorable and others who are dishonorable, some who are, from an ethical and religious perspective, exemplary and others who are inferior' They are there for each other, but yet, no 'egalitarianism' in the church. (DBW 1, 206f.). The individual is carried by the church, but apparently not in such a manner that he becomes invisible as an individual. With Augustin Bonhoeffer can say, 'The church has frequently existed only within a single individual or family.' (*Enarrationes in Psalmos, 128,2*, DBW 1, 214).

Discipleship

Bonhoeffer's social expectations from the church are highly strung. The sanctorum communio strives 'to permeate the life of all communities and societies' (DBW 1, 282) against the powers of evil. But the social and political reality turns out to be more harsh. The Weimar republic fails, Hitler comes to power. Bonhoeffer gets involved in the Confessing Church. The chasm between the realized church in Christ and its actualization in his Spirit on the one hand and the empirical church on the other is greater that the paper of *Sanctorum Communio* allows. The difference between the strong and the weak in the church is felt ever more strongly. As the *communion* of the saints fails, the saint more pointedly comes to the fore.
Somewhere during and after Bonhoeffer's encounter with Jean Laserre in New York the process must have taken place that Bethge in his biography later calls his 'conversion,'[23] his turn from an ambitious theologian to a follower of Christ. Bonhoeffer never talked about it in that way. But in a letter of January 27th, 1936 to Elisabeth Zinn – the woman with whom he gave up a relationship to dedicate himself to his task in the church – written from Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer writes about what happened to him in those years:
'I plunged into work in a very unChristian way. An... ambition that many noticed in me made my life difficult…Back then I was terribly alone and left to

[23] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Eine Biographie,* Chr. Kaiser München 1978, 246ff.

my own devices. It was quite awful. Then something happened, something that has changed and transformed my life to the present day. For the first time I discovered the Bible… I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the church, and talked and preached about it – but I had not yet become a Christian. In a wild and untamed way I was still my own master.[24] I know that at that time I turned the doctrine of Jesus Christ into something of personal advantage for myself… I pray to God that that will never happen again. Also I had never prayed, or prayed only very little. For all my abandonment, I was quite pleased with myself. Then the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount, freed me from that. Since then everything has changed. I have felt this plainly, and so have other people about me. It was a great liberation. It became clear to me that the life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the church, and step by step it became plainer to me how far that must go.' (TF 424f.; DBW 14, 112f. ; cf. DBW 4, 291f.).

In Christ Bonhoeffer encounters the true Other. For him the Bible becomes the place where he faces the truly Strange, a radical alterity. 'A strange place to us in every way and which is contrary to us. But this is the very place God has chosen to encounter us.' (TF 426, letter to R. Schleicher, April 8th, 1936). What takes place is a surrender of power, a relocation of the personal center, a capitulation to a transcending power that is stronger than he and to which he surrenders more and more in those years. A power that is able to conquer Bonhoeffer – a man of very strong character – precisely because it shows itself in weakness, in the cross (ibid.).

From now on Bonhoeffer's theology will also be acquiring the features of an auto-hagiography. It is no longer unrelated to his personal – still under the provision of the simul justus et peccator – complete and unconditional dedication to God's intentions, but is permeated by it.

Discipleship is an indictment against a church that preaches cheap grace ('grace that justifies the sin, but not the sinner'). The book is also the testimony of someone that takes costly grace seriously in his own life. The knowledge amassed in this book 'cannot be separated from the existence in which is was acquired.' (DBW 4, 51) Barth comments that the book about following Christ is 'by far the best of what has been written about discipleship, by a man who sought to make discipleship a reality in his actions, and who in his own way did indeed succeed in that endeavor.' [25] In it we find the same ecclesiology as in SC, in effect, but this time it is so demanding that the strong and the weak in the church are in danger of losing fellowship with each other. Just like in SC, the church and Christ are implicated in each other to the very edge of identification. 'The church is the present Christ himself.' (DBW 4, 218). But something has changed. In the Weimar period Bonhoeffer uses Seeberg's concept of development and growth. After 1933 the image of an increasingly fierce conflict between 'church' and 'world' dominates. In *Discipleship* sanctification is primarily understood as 'separation', 'a clear separation from the world', as a sealing. (DBW 4, 253ff.) From a people's church the church has changed into a

[24] Cf. the similar wording in *Creation and Fall* (DBW 3, 142) about humankind as sicut deus: 'it has itself become creator, source of life… it is alone by itself, it lives out of its own resources, it no longer needs any others, it is the lord of its own world, even though that does mean now that it is the solitary lord and despot of its own mute, violated, silenced, dead, ego-world.'

[25] *Church Dogmatics* 4/2,533f. ('....einem Mann, der die Nachfolge, nachdem er über sie geschrieben, auch persönlich und mit der Tat bis zum Ende wahr machen wollte und in seiner Weise wahr gemacht hat.' (KD IV/2, 604)]

church of volunteers.[26] The pressure on the visible church to form sects increases. 'The life of the saints stands out in contrast against a terribly dark background.' (DBW 4, 263) Now the distinction between the individual and the church pointedly becomes a theme. The calling of the individual is mentioned separately. To be sure Bonhoeffer does say that sanctification outside of the visual church is a form of spiritual pride. I am despising the community if I want to be holy without my brother. 'It is contempt for sinners, since in self-bestowed holiness I withdraw from my church in its sinful form. Sanctification apart from the visible church-community is mere self-proclaimed holiness.' (DBW 4, 262) Yet Bonhoeffer now devotes an entire chapter to 'Discipleship and the Individual' (DBW 4, 92 – 99). It starts with: 'Jesus' call to discipleship makes the disciple into a single individual. … Christ makes everyone he calls into an individual. Each is called alone.' Now too we find an entire chapter on personal sanctification, which extensively discusses Christian asceticism and good works ('The Saints', 253 – 280). The life of the saints becomes a recognizable way of life, a distinct and demanding life form. (cf. also DBW 14, 619f.) Some saints are even destined for martyrdom. (DBW 4, 85, 89, 127, 208, 285f.) It is evident they will be but few. 'The call separates a small group, those who follow, from the great mass of the people. The disciples are few and will always be only a few.' (DBW 4, 175).

A Christian lives under the cross and remains dependent on forgiveness. The Christian Church will never become the 'ideal' church-community of the sinless and the perfect. Yet the fruit of sanctification must not remain invisible. 'It is under this cross that the fruit of sanctification grows.' (DBW 4, 269) 'As saints, they are reminded and admonished to be what they are. They are not required in their sinful state to be holy. That would be an impossibility, a complete relapse into the attempt to earn salvation by works and thus be blasphemy against Christ. Instead, the saints are called to be holy. For they are sanctified in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.' (DBW 4, 263).

In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer puts so much emphasis on the importance of visible sanctification that he runs up against the boundaries the Reformed doctrine of justification. Again and again he repeats, to be sure: following Christ is not a program for life, no ethical ideal. 'It is truly not a program for one's life which would be sensible to implement. It is neither a goal nor an ideal to be sought.' (DBW 4,58) The eschatological judgement of God also entails a total and critical no *and* a gracious yes regarding our lives. 'Those who have faith are being justified; those who are justified are being sanctified; those who are sanctified are being saved on judgment day.' (DBW 4, 280) Nevertheless the follower must pursue his sanctification. The goal of life that cannot be a goal, because it is grace and a gift, must yet become a daily goal of life. Grace without sanctification and discipline is cheap grace. (DBW 14, 740) The courses in Finkenwalde deal with the individual sanctification of the Christian at length under headings like 'Walking, Growth and Fruitfulness' ['Wandeln und Wachsen und Frucht'] (DBW 14, 616f.), 'New Life and Discipleship' ['Neues Leben und Nachfolgen'] (ibid., 618-623) 'The Good Work' (DBW 14, 610 - 616) , 'Concrete Ethics in Paul'['konkrete Ethik bei Paulus'] ibid., 721ff.).

[26] While in SC proclamation still constituted the heart of the church, with the community of baptism and the Lord's Supper as derivatives, it is now the other way around: 'The Christian community is thus essentially the community gathered to celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper, and only then is it the community gathered to hear the word proclaimed.' (DBW 4, 229).

In these years Karl Barth was worrying about Bonhoeffer. How preoccupied he was with 'the inexhaustible theme of justification and sanctification'! Was he not succumbing to the danger of 'a withdrawal from the initial focus on a christological-eschatological reality in favor of some realizations within humanity's own sphere – which actually are always abstract.' (brief van 14-10-1936, DBW 14, 235ff., cf. DBW 4, Afterword, 299f.)? One must observe that Bonhoeffer has explored the boundaries of the Reformation tradition of the *simul iustus et peccator* to the utmost in these years. Without, however, to cross them. In a tense dialectic he keeps them together, justification and sanctification, Paul and James. The main thesis of the book is: 'only the believers obey, and only the obedient believe.' (DBW 4, 63) In analogy to this we read, 'Grace and deed belong together. There is no faith without the good work, just as there is no good work without faith.' (ibid. 278) But with this Bonhoeffer doesn't say anything new, does he? The thesis comes directly from Emil Brunner's *The Divine Imperative* and in his KD IV/2 Karl Barth will later say the same (ibid., note 16; cf. KD IV/2, 572ff.))
Nevertheless, even though he stays within the dialectic of the doctrine of justification, Bonhoeffer has wanted to stretch it to it very limits in the Finkenwalde years. After all the times have changed. Luther had to put all the emphasis on grace, Bonhoeffer must put it on works. 'We never derive any glory from our own works, for we ourselves are God's work. But this is why we have become a new creation in Christ: to attain good works in him.' Therefore: 'Christians need to do good works for the sake of their salvation. … the good work is the goal of being a Christian.' (DBW 4, 278f.)[27]

So in this period sanctification as separation is in focus theologically. The church as a small band. Individual asceticism. But all this understood within the dialectic of justification and within the framework of the church.
Bonhoeffer's process of 'personal sanctification' during this time must be understood against this background. He consciously chooses for celibacy. In Finkenwalde he starts the experiment in communal living in which both group and self-discipline play an important part. Gets radically involved in the church controversy in which he doesn't only takes sides in favor of an independent church but also in favor of civil rights for the Jews. Is a confirmed Sermon-on-Mount-pacifist.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer tries '**to live a holy life'.** A life 'out of the ordinary,' different, more devout, more demanding, more altruistic. Communication with his immediate family becomes more difficult. On January 14th, 1935 he writes to his brother Karl-Friedrich from London that theology used to be mainly an academic affair for him. Now this has become completely different. He has discovered the power of the Sermon on the Mount. 'The restoration of the church will surely come from a sort of monasticism which has in common with the old only the uncompromising attitude of a life lived according to the Sermon of the Mount in the following of Christ.' (TF 423f.) 'It may be that in many things I seem to you to be somewhat fanatical and crazy', he writes to his brother. He won't have been far off the mark.

Letting oneself be drawn into….

[27] Cf. DBW 14, 615 ('Das neue Leben bei Paulus'):'Paulus redet Christen *agioi* an = Ziel ist Heiligung.'

In these years a personal revolution takes place that fills even Bonhoeffer himself with 'some anxieties' (ibid.). But does a *theological* turnaround take place as well? I don't think so. His theology of discipleship is radical in the sense that it stretches the boundaries of tradition to the utmost; it is not new. Renewal and change is not to be sought in Bonhoeffer's theology of sanctification, but in the religious impulse which is at the bottom of it and permeates it.

In its articulation lies his greatest contribution in my opinion. I think it comes out most beautifully and explicitly in the final chapter of *Discipleship.* There he abandons the language of tradition and seeks a new way by which to articulate the interwovenness of Christology, ecclesiology, and ethics. There Bonhoeffer works out the Pauline metaphor of the 'image of Christ'. With this he gives a new and original shape to the dialectic of activity and passivity in discipleship. 'To become "like Christ" – that is what disciples are ultimately destined to become. The image of Jesus Christ, which is always before the disciples' eyes, and before which all other images fade away, enters, permeates, and transforms them, so that the disciples resemble, indeed become like, their master. (…) For disciples, it is not possible to look at the image of the Son of God in aloof, detached contemplation; this image exerts a transforming power.' (DBW 4, 281) 'Those who behold Christ **are being drawn into** Christ's image, changed into the likeness of Christ's form.' (DBW 4, 286).

Here the essential passivity of the faith, crucial for the religious self-understanding of the saint himself, is expressed by means of aesthetic language. Believing is looking and being overcome by what one sees. The other life that the sanctified leads, is happening to him. He lets himself be dragged along, surrenders to a movement he does not oversee nor control, but of which he experiences that it is true and good. A form of *active passivity*, in which the dialectic of justification and sanctification is dynamized. The subject allows itself to be decentered and relocates the center of its life outside of itself in Christ.

This movement is as much a religious as a moral one. Christ has not withdrawn into a metaphysical heaven but becomes flesh in our relationship to the other. Conformity with Christ means to identify with him who was there vicariously for others. Becoming like Christ. 'Being in Christ' thus turns into 'being there for others'.

This exteriorization of identity in a radical alterity seems to me to be the formative vision to which Bonhoeffer devotes himself in these years. 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'; Gal. 2:20 is a favorite text (DBW 4, 152, 221, 267, 287) from *Discipleship* through *Ethics* (122). With this the personal center of the believer gets increasingly relocated into the world and ever less in the church. Bonhoeffer becomes disillusioned with the church controversy, but at the same time gets increasingly involved in the civil-military resistance. Sanctification is no longer seen as ecclesiastical separation but worldly responsibility. The term sanctification may be virtually absent in *Ethics*, but the issue is the same. It's about partaking of the visible, concrete form, the shape that Christ assumes among us today.

In the central concept of Conformation the continuity with *Discipleship* is clearly visible. The Christian life means taking on the form of Christ. It means, 'to live the life of Jesus Christ' (E 42). Love is not a subjective act, but 'something which happens to man, something passive, something over which he does not dispose, simply because it lies beyond his existence in disunion. Love means the undergoing of the transformation of one's entire existence of

God; it means being drawn into the world as it lives and must live before God and in God.' (E 55) Like in *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer refuses to describe 'Conformation' in terms of 'Planning' or 'Programme'. 'On the contrary, formation comes only by being drawn in into the form of Christ.' (E 81) Christ represents the God who did not withdraw from the world but received it. Therefore conformation does not allow a flight into a religious inwardness. On the contrary, it leads to a dynamical, practical exteriorization of the center of life. 'Christian life is participation in the encounter of Christ with the world.' (E 132)

In *Ethics* Bonhoeffer describes fellowship with Christ as a 'change in the point of unity' (E 239). A person no longer finds his identity, his unity, within himself, in his autonomy, but only coincides with himself outside of himself. 'The great change takes place at the moment when the unity of existence ceases to consist in its autonomy and is found, through the miracle of faith, beyond the man's ego and its law, in Jesus Christ…. This means that I can now find unity with myself only in the surrender of my ego to God and to men.' (ibid.)

It seems to me that in the surrender of self being expressed here, the paradox of sainthood that becomes visible with Bonhoeffer, is included as well. Wanting to become a saint means pursuing giving up pursuing something *oneself*. The activity to make yourself completely passive. It is to make surrendering the center of your life…the center of your life. Whoever wants to be a saint doesn't want to be one any more. He betrays the very thing that it's about for a saint, the act of self-surrender.[28] With Bonhoeffer this paradox is materially expressed in the doctrine of justification. In his theological epistemology the paradox continually returns in variants to the distinction between *fides directa* and *fides reflexa* (an old set of terms from the doctrine of baptism since *Act and Being*). The believer who is 'in Christ' (the baptized child) does not know that he believes. Directing the believing self-awareness toward itself is a perversion of its transcendental character. Believing is not a conscious activity, not an act of the will, not a personal choice, but an unconscious participation in the elective activity of God himself, hidden from reflection, only to be imagined in retrospect. Faith is hidden from itself. 'What is visible should be hidden at the same time; at the same time both visible and not to be seen.' (DBW 4, 149) The model of life for the believer is thus not the wise old man but the innocent child (end of *Act and Being*).[29]

So we actually encounter the same religious groundswell at the base of *Ethics* that also forms the foundation of the doctrine of sanctification in *Discipleship*. But now no longer articulated in terms of separation but of a turning to the world. The active implications of this passive surrender are no less demanding than in *Discipleship*, but their action radius has been moved and broadened. Truly taking over responsibility – the worldly form of substitution – is still restricted to a minority, an elite. 'The exclusive demand for a clear profession of allegiance to Christ causes the band of confessing Christians to become ever smaller. (E 60, cf. E 74f.: 'the small band of the upright' ; E 84: only in a small band…') But letting oneself be carried along in the movement of 'conformation' does not lead to isolation with regard to the world, but on the

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[28] Cf. also Colin Grant, *Altruism and Christian Ethics,* Cambridge University Press Cambridge 2001, 234ff.

[29] 'Baptism is the call to the human being into childhood, a call that can be understood only eschatologically.' 'The child is near to the eschata.' 'The one [Mann] who became an adult in exile and misery becomes a child at home.' (DBW 2, 160f.)

contrary to a total participation in its life. 'The more exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as our Lord, the more fully the wide range of his dominion will be disclosed to us.'(E 60) This Bonhoeffer emphatically presents as an experience one must actually go through – in resisting Hitler, e.g. - not as a metaphysical speculation, not as an abstract *theologoumenon.*

Sainthood - 'not religiously' interpreted

Finally we turn to the *Letters and Papers from Prison.* In the letters we find an autobiographical theology, the genre of which differs from his previous theological work. The letters are to be read as an ego-document of the Christian and theologian Bonhoeffer, who, facing death, takes final stock of his life in the privacy of his cell.[30] Because of their largely narrative and autobiographical nature they give the reader opportunities for identification which are lacking in the strictly theological work.
We can now better understand the letter of July 21st, 1944, with which we began. Bonhoeffer makes use of a number of exclusive oppositions. To begin with (1): over against the ideal of the saint that was so attractive to Jean Laserre, he posits that of 'faith'. Over against (2) the 'attempt to make something of oneself' he sets forgoing this completely, 'living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities.' Next (3): wanting to become a saint is an activity, faith is to be seen as a passivity, 'allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event, thus fulfilling Isa. 53.' (LPP 361f.) 'We throw ourselves completely into the arms of God'**.** Then (4): believing is a total act of life, in which we totally surrender to this-worldliness. It finds its counterpart – mentioned explicitly elsewhere in the letters, though not here - in the separation, the religious flight from the world. Next (5): 'The "religious act" is always something partial; "faith" is something whole, involving the whole of one's life.' (LPP 362) Finally (6): in the metanoia we participate in God's suffering in this world; as saints we merely reflect upon ourselves and our own suffering.
All these dualities belong in the framework of an overarching opposition that emerges in the letters, that between 'faith/life' and 'religion'. 'Religion' does not stand for a concept subject to reflection in the Barthian sense. It rather functions as a dark background to what the Christian faith is about according to Bonhoeffer: life.[31] 'Jesus calls men, not to a new religion, but to life.' (LPP 362) The conversation with Laserre in New York is placed into this newly developed conceptual framework retrospectively.

RELIGION	LIFE/FAITH
Saint	*Believer*
Religious method	Act of life
Active (to make something of ourselves)	Passive (allowing oneself to be caught up)

[30] Cf. Von Weizsäcker, op. cit. 44: ‚In geheimnisvoller Weise trägt sie die Merkmale eines Alterswerks: Sichtöffnung durch die Nähe des Todes, deren Ausdruck in Worten Schritte andeutet, die der Redende gleichsam ahnend getan hat, obwohl man sie in der Welt, in der er gelebt hat, nicht tun kann.'
[31] I am here following in particular Ralf K. Wüstenberg, *A Theology of Life*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity, Wm. Eerdmans Publ. Co., Grand Rapids 1998.

Homo religiosus?	Human and Christ
Partial	Total
Separation from the world	This-worldliness
Reflection on one's own suffering	Participation in God's suffering in the world

Does this all mean that 'living a holy life', once so attractive for Bonhoeffer, will now only be set in a negative light? On the contrary. He himself indicates that he still stands behind the theology of *Discipleship,* in spite of his misgivings. More likely one can argue that the doctrine of sanctification developed there is now being broadened and deepened with regard to the world. It is now being read explicitly 'non-religiously'. 'Sanctification' too apparently belongs to the concepts that he now wants to think through in a 'worldly' way – 'in the sense of the Old Testament and of John 1.14'. (LPP 286f. Letter of May 5th, 1994).
Thus we see how essential components of the doctrine of sanctification that were developed earlier within the ecclesiastical framework of the doctrine of justification, now return in a 'worldly' setting.
Bonhoeffer thinks through the implications of the earthly orientation of the Old Testament and the incarnation. This brings him to the conclusion: 'It is not with the beyond that we are concerned… What is above this world is, in the gospel, intended to exist *for* this world.' (LPP 286). And that's true for sanctification as well. Sanctification becomes almost synonymous with 'learning to become fully human', 'a complete human being and therefore a Christian in the widest sense of the term' (LPP 193, 23.1.1944, slightly altered translation). An education toward humaneness, for which the gospel supplies the test criteria and the impulses toward quality. The discovery of 'the profound this-worldliness of Christianity' brings Bonhoeffer to the insight that 'the Christian is not a homo religiosus, but simply a human being, as Jesus was a human being.' Being a Christian, however, qualifies this human this-worldliness. 'Being a complete human being means not to live in the shallow and banal this-worldliness the enlightened, the busy, the comfortable, or the lascivious, but the profound this-worldliness, characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection.' (21 July 1944, LPP 369) In all this the motto is no longer separation, but fully participating in the life of the world. Not saying no, but yes and yes again. No withdrawal, but surrender. Yet the core of the doctrine of sanctification developed earlier is still there. I mention 4 points:

1. The eschatological judgement, under which Bonhoeffer first placed the growth and progress of personal sanctification in the church, returns as the judgement of history over each self-contained human plan for life. 'We used to think that one of the inalienable human rights was that one should be able to plan both one's professional and one's private life. That is a thing of the past. The force of circumstances has brought us into a situation where we have to give up being "anxious about tomorrow" (Matt. 6, 34)' , we read in 'After Ten Years' (December 1943) (TF 484). Wanting to make your life count is not a realistic goal for life. When one surrenders to God, one surrenders to history. And 'God is in the facts themselves.' (January 23rd, 1944, LPP 190). Therefore: your life is *being made* to count. Bonhoeffer becomes deeply aware of the fragmentary nature of a human life. It cannot be

brought to fulfillment; it can only be fulfilled by God. Is therefore the pursuit of fulfillment pointless? No: 'this very fragmentariness may, in fact, point toward a fulfillment beyond the limits of human achievement.' ((February 20th, 1944, LPP 215) Here too we see: being human is pursuing a goal that's impossible to pursue. The dialectic of being active and passive, action and surrender, of the doctrine of justification can still be recognized. '… there remains for us only the very narrow way, often extremely difficult to find, of living every day as if it were our last, and yet living in faith and responsibility as though there were to be a great future.' ('After Ten Years', LPP 15)

2. The reality of the *church* as a concrete social context within which Bonhoeffer lives has been largely forced into the background. The actual church as it exists – including the Confessing Church! - is present mainly as a disappointment. In a certain sense its part has been taken over by Bonhoeffer's family. The theology of substitution is being realized in actuality. They are close to each other, support each other and are supported by each other. Bonhoeffer experiences this daily. 'I believe that this helping one another ['dieses Füreinandereintreten'] is a heritage in which all the members of the family share.' (LPP 150; 29.11.1943). 'The wish to be independent in everything is false pride. Even what we owe to others belongs to ourselves and is part of our own lives, and any attempt to calculate what we have "earned" for ourselves and what we owe to other people is certainly not Christian, and is moreover, a futile undertaking. It's through what he himself is, plus what he receives, that a man becomes a complete entity.' (LPP 150, 30.11.1943) In SC Bonhoeffer quoted the word of Augustin, 'The church has frequently existed only within a single individual or family.' (*Enarrationes in Psalmos, 128,2*, DBW 1, 214). It seems to have become true for Bonhoeffer in prison.
3. Asceticism and discipline, which Bonhoeffer so emphatically put on the ecclesiastical agenda during the Finkenwalde period, are still clearly present as themes in prison. But now in a 'worldly', no longer in a 'religious' sense. Now Bonhoeffer continually underscores the importance of social and cultural 'Bildung' in order to become completely human. He is himself a representative of the 'Bildungsbürgertum', the German academic version the Greek *paideia.* Raised in a tradition which made high demands upon self-discipline, intellectual, moral, and musical education. 'All this is an untrained gift of yours', [eine unausgebildete Begabung] he writes about Bethge's drawing ability. 'With me, on the other hand, training [Bildung] is almost everything. Without training I would be a quite tedious don!'(LPP 309; Letter of May 26, 1944). In this social environment one could not imagine freedom without self-restraint. The poem 'Stations on the Way to Freedom' was written on the same day as the letter in which he says he doesn't want to become a saint (July 21st, 1944). In it 'Discipline' is the first station, *before* 'Action', 'Suffering' and 'Death' (TF 516); 'If you set out to seek freedom, then above all you must learn so to discipline your senses and soul, that by your lusts and your limbs you be not led hither and yon. Chaste be your spirit and body, wholly subjected to your own control, ready to strive for the goal that is set out before you. For the secret of freedom no one discovers, without rigorous disciplining of self.' Asceticism remains essential. But it is no

longer situated in the religious context of the doctrine of justification, but in pedagogy. Again and again Bonhoeffer speaks of 'Bildung', as the worldly counterpart of the personal sanctification of the Christian. (WEN 206, 217, 224, 259). In the period in which he writes Discipleship, he takes the sanctification ideal of the *antropoos teleioos* from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:48), the whole human being in the sense of 'complete' or 'perfect'. It is in contrast there to the man who is divided within himself (*aner dipsychos*) from James (James. 1:8). In Finkenwalde the *antropoos teleioos* is part of the doctrine of good works (DBW 14, 614). In the letters from prison, however, it is an ideal for 'the Christian and the "cultured" man' [Gebildete] (LPP 200, January 29th and 30th, 1944). They are mentioned in the same breath and are in fact identical.

4. Bonhoeffer is very negative about the 'Ungebildeten'. His judgement on those that show a lack of courage and self-discipline is uncommonly harsh. He simply despises such people. His sense of quality is only becoming stronger, he observes. ('After Ten Years', LPP 12f.) Perhaps there is a need for a new cultural and moral elite. His criticism of the ideal of equality, already articulated in SC, only becomes more intense in prison. People are not equal. In his 'Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of Dietrich Wilhelm Rüdiger Bethge' (May 1944) he wonders, 'whether we are moving towards an age of the selection of the fittest, i.e. an aristocratic society, or to uniformity in all material and spiritual aspects of human life. Although there has been a very far-reaching equalization here, the sensitiveness in all ranks of society for the human values of justice, achievement, and courage could create a new selection of people who will be allowed the right to provide strong leadership.(LPP 299) ' People are different, and the differences between them must be named, weighed, and recognized. But Bonhoeffer isn't thinking of an elite of power. The 'fittest' in this connection are not the strongest, in spite of the Darwinist terminology. Bonhoeffer and his people prove to be 'lebensstark' (!) only when they have learned 'to renounce our privileges' and 'consciously submit ourselves to divine judgment, and so prove ourselves worthy to survive by identifying ourselves generously and unselfishly with the life of the community and the suffering of our fellow-man.' [in… weitherziger und selbstloser Teilnahme am Ganzen ... als lebensstark erweisen' WEN 327] By living inside out in this way a person participates in God's suffering in this world. [cf. LPP 361/ WEN 395: about 'allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event'; 'das Hineingerissenwerden in das messianische Leiden Gottes in Jesus Christus']

Conclusion

Bonhoeffer's theological objectives in the prison letters have become moral, cultural, political ones. Christian faith lends depth and quality to the good life in a righteous society, but is not an end in itself. That is what separates 'faith' from 'religion'. So 'sanctification' does not appear as an independent theme in the last letters, but thematically it is widely discussed in the framework of educational policy and an ethics of the individual art of living. The doctrine of justification and ecclesiology are no longer

explicitly visible as a conceptual framework. What has remained is the basic religious impulse: the passive activity by which one surrenders to the God who lets himself be found in Jesus Christ; the alterity of the decentered self.

To the extent that he has been able in actual practice to render this doctrine of sanctification his own, Bonhoeffer shows himself to be a saint. Not in the sense of Susan Wolf's moral saint. 'Too much altruism is oppressive and exacting; "egoism" can be less selfish and less demanding', Bonhoeffer himself also writes (May 6th, 1944, LPP 287). He sought happiness for himself that was destined for no one else. Even in Finkenwalde there was a piano – just like in Lambarene. Was he then a saint in the sense of a religious virtuoso? That's questionable as well. Even though his spirituality is impressive, he was no homo religiosus, as he even felt himself. 'For all my sympathy with the contemplative life, I am not a born Trappist.' (LPP 40, May 15th, 1943).
But we would like to call Bonhoeffer a saint in the sense of Robert Merrihaw Adams: as someone who wanted to learn what it means 'to participate in God's interests.' Someone who underwent the continuing influence of the formative vision in which his identity was shaped. Sure, Bonhoeffer was a saint that didn't want to be one. But no saint wants that. The conscious intention of sainthood spells its own demise – just like with doing good.[32] I think that Colin Grant is right when he writes: 'the saints did not care for anything other than simply to serve God, and I doubt that they ever had it in mind to become saints. If that were the case, they would have become only perfectionists, rather than saints.'[33] Saints are 'so blissfully unself-conscious'[34], says Grant, that they're not into self-justification. So don't call a saint a saint. They don't want to be dismissed that easily.

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Abbreviations:

TF *A Testament of Freedom*, The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Revised Edition, Geffrey B. Kelly/ F. Burton Nelson, eds. , HarperSanFrancisco, New York 1995.
DBW 1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 1: *Sanctorum Communio.* A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church, Clifford Green (ed.), Fortress Press Minneapolis 1998.
DBW 2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 2: *Act and Being.* Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology, Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. (ed.), Fortress Press Minneapolis 1996.

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[32] Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1958, 74: 'Goodness can exist only when it is not perceived, not even by its author; whoever sees himself performing a good work is no longer good, but at best a useful member of society or a dutiful member of a church. Therefore: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."'
[33] Op. cit. 240.
[34] Ibid..

DBW 3 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 3: *Creation and Fall*. A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1 – 3, John W. de Gruchy (ed.), Fortress Press Minneapolis 1997.
DBW 4 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4: *Discipleship.* Geffrey B. Kelly / John D. Godsey (eds.), Fortress Press Minneapolis 2001.
DBW 13 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke (German Edition), Volume 13: *London 1933 – 1935,* Hans Goedeking, Martin Heimbucher, Hans-Walter Schleicher(eds.), Chr. Kaiser München 1994.
DBW 14 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke (German Edition), Volume 14: *Illegale Theologenausbildung Finkenwalde 1935 – 1937,* Otto Dudzus / Jürgen Henkys (eds.), Chr. Kaiser München 1996.
E*Ethics,* Simon & Schuster, New York etc. (translation of the German edition of 1949)
LPP *Letters and Papers from Prison*. The Enlarged Edition, Eberhard Bethge (ed.), SCM Press LTD, London 1971.
WENW*iderstand und Ergebung. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft*, Eberhard Bethge. Neuausgabe, Chr. Kaiser München 1977.