A Particular Europe, a Universal Faith

THE CHRISTIAN HUMANISM OF BONHOEFFER'S ETHICS IN ITS CONTEXT

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Bonhoeffer, Europe, and the *Ethics* – if we take these three themes together we greatly limit our scope. Our discussion revolves around Bonhoeffer in the years 1939-1943, when he was an active member of the resistance against Hitler; it revolves around the battlefield of Europe; and it revolves around the fragments of the book which Bonhoeffer was writing during these years in that same Europe — the *Ethics,* a book which, as we shall see later, has been strongly influenced by this specific background. But I want to limit our scope gradually, and would like to begin by making a few general remarks about Bonhoeffer and Europe.

1

Bonhoeffer and Europe? The notion of 'Bonhoeffer and Germany' seems easier for us to imagine. 'He was German' was Paul Lehmann's judgment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer after they met in 1930. In saying so, Lehmann was thinking of Bonhoeffer's 'passion for perfection, whether of manners, of performance, of all that is connoted by the word *Kultur*.'[1] But is *Kultur,* apart from its being a German word, also something restricted to German culture and German culture alone?

Bonhoeffer's upbringing in the family of a German professor was by no means devoid of a whiff of nationalism. 'For what I have I thank this nation, through this nation I became what I am' — thus Keith Clements cites the twenty-two year old Bonhoeffer at the beginning of his study of Bonhoeffer's patriotism.[2] Bonhoeffer was German and, as Clements rightly said, 'he never disowned his Germanness.' But how nationalist, for example, is a patriotism that prays for the defeat of Germany (as Bonhoeffer did in 1941)?[3] In Bonhoeffer's case, did the narrow-mindedness of nationalism ever take precedence over the broad-mindedness of humanism? To Bonhoeffer, the concept 'German' never meant first and foremost the political passion for Prussian hegemony;[4] to his mind, a cultural scale of values, not so much specifically German as generally European, always came first. If Bonhoeffer spoke with a German accent, sometimes more, sometimes less pronounced, and if at times he used words peculiar to the German vocabulary, his declensions and conjugations were those of a European grammar.

Let me explain. Bonhoeffer grew up in a family that was part of the *Bildungsbürgertum* — a word for which no adequate translation exists because it describes a social class that existed only in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany and nowhere else in Europe. The bourgeoisie, which elsewhere rose to economic and political importance as a class, saw its emancipation checked by the absolutism of the

small German states. It then found an alternative outlet for its ambitions, that of intellectual and cultural development, of *Kultur*. A small elite, lacking in social power, invested its energy in the *Bildung* of the personality of the individual and the *Geselligkeit* within a small circle. And so Germany became the country of Goethe and Kant, not the country of Smith and Rousseau — a country of thinkers and poets, not economists and politicians.[5]

And yet, this specifically German class consciousness of the specifically German *Bildungsbürgertum* provided the generally European humanist tradition of the sixteenth century with the sanctuary which the intensive, expansive capitalism of the rest of Europe progressively denied it. Goethe takes Erasmus once again and what used to be called *humanitas* in sixteenth-century Latin now became *Bildung* in nineteenth-century German.

The *Bildungsbürgertum* was a unique sociological constellation. But in its uniqueness it contributed to the building and continuity of a general European tradition; a tradition which, though it no longer seemed to have the right of existence elsewhere, was able to develop in relative peace in Germany, in the shade of the quest for economic and political expansion which gripped the rest of Europe.

The Bonhoeffer family was part of this intellectual and cultural elite — an elite which, with its values such as liberty, responsibility, reason, and individuality, might have been associated exclusively with a particular social class, but did not limit itself to the nation of Germany.

Studying the humanities at school, absorbing the classics, travelling to Rome; in doing so, Bonhoeffer did exactly what all humanists since the sixteenth century had done. *Kultur* is the word Paul Lehmann used to label the German Bonhoeffer. But when he went on to describe that concept in English, it became 'an aristocracy of the spirit at its best.'[6]

But maybe we are turning Bonhoeffer into a European rather too quickly and identifying the *Bildungsbürger* with the *honnête homme* or *gentleman*. For the young Bonhoeffer, Europe might have meant Rome; it certainly did not mean London, Paris, or New York.

'The West' reminded him more of the German defeat in World War I in which he had lost a brother, or of the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles, than of the civilization of which he also was part.[7] Bonhoeffer was also brought up with the contradiction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* — German thoroughness as opposed to Anglo-Saxon straightforwardness and French frivolity, personal *Bildung* as opposed to mechanical technical science. He too, in view of his German background, was to choose the former and reject the latter.[8]

In post-1870 Germany, where Bonhoeffer grew up, these differences in nuance were magnified into irreconcilable antagonisms. The *gebildete* class was also mobilized, in its own way, when Germany attempted to overtake the rest of Europe after its late unification under Prussian hegemony. The frustration of having missed out on the economic revolution led, after 1870, to an outburst of revolutionary capitalism and imperialism with the rest of Europe as rival — a competition which resulted in World War I. Dietrich Bonhoeffer grew up surrounded by this competitive nationalism and the hangover of 1918 formed part of his cultural heritage.

Anti-Western feelings were never exploited in the Bonhoeffer family and so the *Geiste von 1914*, which depicted the war against France as a crusade of *Kultur* against *Zivilisation* (as did Thomas Mann in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen)*, left the Bonhoeffers cold. Yet this historical and nationalist-political background does explain the young Bonhoeffer's ambivalence between universal humanism on the one hand and German nationalism on the other — the ambivalence between 'the love of our country and the peace of mankind'[9], as Bonhoeffer himself called the two in one breath when discussing in New York his membership in the German youth movement.

To the young Bonhoeffer, Europe never meant only Rome; it also meant Versailles — a diffused ambivalence toward cultural tradition and political reality as yet uncrystallized.

2

All that changed in 1930/1931. Bonhoeffer's sojourn in the United States signified in many ways a drastic breach in his understanding of himself and his attitude toward European culture. The *Gebildete,* who at first did not know what he was doing in the United States (he originally wanted to go to the East rather than the West)[10], the *Kultur*-expert who crossed the Atlantic to teach rather than to learn (he lectured on dialectical theology to an American audience), returned a different man. His attitude towards European culture underwent a threefold change.

First, Bonhoeffer became acquainted with a pragmatic-technical culture which, although it existed in part of Europe, was very different from the European culture that Bonhoeffer was familiar with. The reader of Goethe, as Bonhoeffer was, studied William James and, as he did, the interrelation between thought and deed which this pragmatism displays captivated him permanently.

The classically oriented Bonhoeffer started to explore the modern culture of the West, exchanging the museums of ancient Rome and the concert halls of Berlin for the cinemas of New York. And yet, Bonhoeffer did complain about the superficiality of a mass-culture that tended to level everything, but he did so without anti-Americanism, without the feeling of superiority of an outsider. Bonhoeffer accepted the capitalist world he became acquainted with in the United States as *his* world, even if he did criticize it. Bonhoeffer became a contemporary shareholder of his culture without nationalist or elitist reservations. From then on, Rome and New York belonged together as one cultural unit in Bonhoeffer's thinking, a 'European-American civilization'[11] with a shared present and a common future.

Second, this modern Western culture did away with the former national and cultural contrasts and posed new tasks. In New York, the German Dietrich Bonhoeffer met the Frenchman Jean Lasserre — an acquaintance which was to have a profond influence on Bonhoeffer's Christian pacifism and his understanding of the Sermon on the Mount, an acquaintance which would also banish any traces of national parochialism from Bonhoeffer's thinking.

In an interview which Jean Lasserre granted F. Burton Nelson in 1977, he described a visit to the cinema in New York in the spring of 1931, when he and Bonhoeffer went to see the film based on Remarque's novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

> The audience was American, and since the film had been made from the point of view of the German soldiers, the audience immediately sympathized with the German soldiers. When they killed French soldiers on the screen, the crowd laughed and applauded. On the other hand, when the German soldiers were wounded or killed, there was a great silence and sense of deep emotion.

All this time, Bonhoeffer the German, and Lasserre the Frenchman, sat side by side in silence. This experience made such an impact on Lasserre that when talking about it forty-five years later he still bursts into tears. In his opinion it made the same impact on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 'That experience in the movie theater was a real experience, tragically real, and it must have certainly left its mark on him.'[12] Whereas Bonhoeffer's grandfather became a citizen of Europe at the sight of the forum Romanum, Bonhoeffer became a citizen of Europe watching a movie in New York.

After his years in New York, Bonhoeffer became deeply and permanently involved in the international struggle for peace within the ecumenical movement, constantly crossing frontiers which, in his opinion, no longer had a right to exist and which also again threatened the future of Europe.

Finally, in New York, Bonhoeffer became acutely aware not only of his national, but also of his social frontiers. He came face to face with the black proletariat, made friends (Frank Fisher), and without any reservations whatsoever, became involved in a world unknown to him. This availability and open-mindedness he would maintain with the same personal application once back in Berlin. Bonhoeffer saw the other side of the capitalist coin — another facet of the same Europe, a Europe which, from then on, was voiced as much in a record of Negro spirituals played for labourers' children as through harmonious chamber music in the Bonhoeffer drawing room.[13]

And so, in the eyes of the young Bonhoeffer, the appearance of Europe had drastically changed within the space of a single year. No longer determined by the academic circles of university professor, it was now defined by the conflict-ridden social and political reality of capitalism and nationalism. From then on, Bonhoeffer's attitude was one of active involvement, no longer one of distant contemplation. Bonhoeffer had said good-bye to the stable, harmonious *Persönlichkeit*, the *Gemeinschaft* of the like-minded. Human beings treated like mass products, nations denying each other the right to exist — these were the concrete realities which from then on determined the character of the one and only 'European-American civilization.'

In this single designation which he used in his discourse, 'Das Recht auf Selbstbehauptung' (1932), Bonhoeffer embraced the whole of Western culture. But precisely when he was granting Europe such a unity for the first time, Europe was conflict-ridden and destructive in character. The European (thus Bonhoeffer too) could only survive by destroying nature and his fellow man. European civilization was a civilization of factories and wars. In this, Europe distinguished itself from the civilization of the East, which preached and practiced respect for life and a passive rather than an aggressive approach.

Perhaps, Bonhoeffer speculated in front of an audience of technical students in Berlin, India and Gandhi had a survival strategy to offer to a European-American civilization which was dragging itself further and further along the road to self-destruction.[14]

It is remarkable — also with respect to his thinking in the *Ethics*, ten years later — that in 1932 Bonhoeffer refused to acknowledge qualitative differences within the one European culture, that he saw its unity precisely in its surge toward self-destruction. Within the space of a single year, his close confrontation with this twentieth-century Europe seemed to have robbed Bonhoeffer of any faith in the power of the classical humanist values with which he had been raised. To the Bonhoeffer of 1932, conflict, not unity; mechanization, not the building of the personality; anonymity, not individuality, were the factors that comprised Europe.

During these years Bonhoeffer despaired of Europe and he no longer held any hope for the future of European Christianity. Yet to his skepticism towards Europe was linked his hopes for India. The future of the West had to come from the East.[15] Meanwhile, the distinction between Europe and America had been reduced to a minimum. The only plus Bonhoeffer was prepared to grant the Germans was their ability to realize more quickly and acutely how hopeless the situation of Europe had become.[16]

Although nothing ever came of Bonhoeffer's Indian plans, Bonhoeffer gradually became a non-European. With Europe on the verge of the abyss and Christianity dying, he looked for new fertile soil for the Christian faith.[17] Bonhoeffer's attitude in the matter became more and more radical as the political situation deteriorated after Hitler's rise to power in January 1933, and as Bonhoeffer increasingly adopted the profile of a Christian and a Christian alone.

The lecture 'Das Recht auf Selbstbehauptung' can be interpreted as Bonhoeffer's final attempt to draw from the connection between European culture and Christianity a system of ethics applicable to his situation. From 'mature European thinking' Bonhoeffer derived the notion of responsibility, which would still be able to curtail the anarchism of the Western concept of liberty, if interpreted radically. In every form of community we know in the West — marriage, work, church, nation — we recognize that same responsibility as a moral motive capable of regulating our behaviour to the point of self-sacrifice.[18] To learn this truth, the European does not have to go to India — it is part of his own tradition, his Christian tradition; for according to Bonhoeffer, the radical ideal of self-surrender can only be understood if one places 'in the background of this Western idea the horizon of Christianity.'[19] It is on the sacrifice of the one man Jesus Christ that the universal bearing and validity of responsibility are founded.

In guiding Europe back to its Christian roots, Bonhoeffer offered his culture, seemingly at death's door, a last straw in vain, and 1933 saw the last of this kind of Christian Europeanness or humanist Christianity in Bonhoeffer's theology.

The Finkenwalde training college for the ministry became Bonhoeffer's India, and Europe became the stakes in the question: Germanism or Christianity? There was no alternative.[20] After 1933 Bonhoeffer's skepticism and despair of 1932 gave way to an

intense Christian expectation of parousia. Bonhoeffer's theology of discipleship had strong echatological characteristics. Europe was the battlefield where God and the devil were doing battle, while the Christian took part. The Christian had to stay in the world to prepare himself all the better to carry out a 'frontal attack.'[21] Bonhoeffer was a citizen of Europe in these years, but he was one in spite of himself.

3

Bonhoeffer's hasty but well-considered return from the United States on July 7, 1939, following his carefully prepared emigration, marks yet another turn in his attitude vis-à-vis Europe. The eschatological dissociation was abandoned in favour of an unconditional solidarity. Not that his objective judgement on the condition of Europe underwent any change after his return to Germany. 'The West has come face to face with the Void', wrote Bonhoeffer in *Ethics,* but he could have written the same in *Nachfolge*.[22] And were not the grounds for saying so even stronger in 1941 than they were in 1937?

The obvious shift in Bonhoeffer's thinking, however, was connected with his increasing involvement in the civil resistance against Hitler. His motives for returning to Germany clearly indicate the changes in emphasis in his thinking. I distinguish three.

3.1. Bonhoeffer returned to resume his share of the church struggle. 'I am drawn towards my fighting brothers. The political situation is terrible, and I must be with my brothers', he confided to Paul Lehmann on 30 June 1939. And his decision was made. 'I must go back to the ''trenches'' (I mean of the church struggle).'[23]

3.2. Bonhoeffer returned for the sake of Germany. He refused to be an outsider during the bleak times faced by his country, now at war; he wished to 'take part in Germany's vicissitudes.'[24] Bonhoeffer became a nationalist once again, not out of pride, but out of solidarity and readiness to share his nation's guilt. That is why he wrote before leaving the United States: 'I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our *national* history ... share the trials of this time with *my people*.'[25] The national community became a community of destiny joined in guilt. This is how Bonhoeffer once again learned to say 'we Germans.'[26]

3.3. And yet Bonhoeffer's patriotism was determined and confined at both ends of the spectrum. Bonhoeffer's solidarity was not with Germany in general; it was with 'the *Christian* people of Germany', as he wrote. And he considered it his duty to return with a view to the 'reconstruction of *Christian* life in Germany after the war.' With Christian life in mind, Bonhoeffer found himself forced once again to link Christian faith with European culture, a connection he had come to discard during the previous years. 'Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization will survive, or willing the

victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization.'[27] Bonhoeffer knew what his choice would be; he opted for Christian civilization. But it was precisely in this anti-nationalism that he discovered true patriotism: choosing a Christian Europe really meant choosing for Germany.

Bonhoeffer's choice found expression in his participation in the German resistance against Hitler, in the group centred around his brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi — a divergent collection of splinter groups united by the fact that they were, as Bonhoeffer's friend and confidant, George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, put it in 1945, among 'the upholders of the European tradition in Germany.'[28]

From 1939 onward, Bonhoeffer was once again a citizen of Europe, and without reservation. And along with the abyss and the void arose the question of fresh opportunities for the future of Europe. Along with pessimism concerning Hitler appeared optimism concerning the success of the resistance. On August 26, 1941, Bonhoeffer reminded Bethge of their travels through Europe together in 1936 and 1939. At the centre of the battlefield of Europe, Bonhoeffer, remembering those journeys, again spoke of 'hopes and tasks for Europe' and 'the task of the church in the future,'[29] and this in spite of the fact that Hitler was victorious on all fronts.

4

In the *Ethics,* Bonhoeffer lent shape to his hopes and fears, his appraisal and criticism of European culture. Here we rediscover many elements from his earlier views on Western culture. Sometimes we seem to be looking at the German *Kulturbürger* again, the Bonhoeffer of Berlin and Barcelona, sometimes we recognize the highly critical view of his own culture which Bonhoeffer developed in New York; throughout the work we find the Christian radicalism of the Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer. But we find all of this in a new, specifically historical and biographical setting — that of the German resistance against Hitler. As research into the background and character of this resistance takes off,[30] it becomes clear how deeply Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* is marked by this context. In one sense, the *Ethics* can be defined as an ideology of this resistance.

In saying so we do not indulge in a kind of sociological reductionism; Bonhoeffer himself took as an origin for his *Ethics,* a 'living experience', 'an actual concrete experience,' a well-defined 'situation.'[31] In his *Ethics,* Bonhoeffer wanted to write more than a general Christian ethic; he practiced a kind of contextual theology of culture in that work. *Ethics* was to serve as a draft for 'the foundation and structure of a united West' (one of the subtitles Bonhoeffer considered for the book), in which he wished to rethink the relationship between Christian faith and European culture. This constituted part of his contribution to the resistance movement. For along with his services as a courier abroad and a moral sounding board (notably for Hans von Dohnanyi), Bonhoeffer was involved in the concepetual preparation of a post-war Europe, a Germany beyond Point Zero: 'The foundations and structure of a future world' was another subtitle Bonhoeffer had ready for his *Ethics* .[32]

Present-day research concerning Bonhoeffer points out with increasing clarity how

closely Bonhoeffer's cultural theology in *Ethics* was linked to the prevailing situation. Let me describe four characteristics common to both the German civil resistance and the *Ethics*.

First of all, there are the specifically German accents which had already led Karl Barth to claim that *Ethics* (he was especially thinking of the doctrine of the mandates here) 'is not quite free from a slight whiff of North German patriarchalism.'[33] In the small circle of the like-minded, Bonhoeffer learned to say 'we Germans' once again. I think it is important to stress that he did not do do out of social narrowmindedness, but out of a sense of political responsibility; in order to present a true front in the negotiations with the allies about the post-war future, Bonhoeffer, like the rest of the German resistance, had to take up a position as a German, to embody the 'other' Germany. He had to be ready to bear the specifically German guilt concerning the past and to take on the specifically German responsibility for the future role of Germany in Europe.

In this context, Bonhoeffer admitted the servile obedience, the scrupulous lack of readiness to act, the excess of thought and lack of deeds of his people. Yet at the same time he upheld the German reserve vis-à-vis Anglo-Saxon thinking. He and his fellow members of the resistance with him preferred not to have post-war Germany fall victim to an unbridled and excessive liberalism, not even in its most immediate sense of democracy.[34] In the eyes of the *Bildungs* elite of which Bonhoeffer was part, the *échec* of the Weimar Republic once again strengthened the old contradiction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, a contradiction which seemed to have disappeared from Bonhoeffer's thinking from 1930 onwards.[35]

In this way he also dissociated himself from the French Revolution in so far as it embodied revolutionary nationalism. He preferred Prussian absolutism of the state, as expressed in 'true Prussian cicles', endowed with common sense, to the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people.[36] The German tradition which had to continue consisted of Bismarck as well as Kant and Goethe.

But we must be careful not to make too much of a German of the Bonhoeffer in *Ethics*. For alongside Bismarck's ideas on government we find those of Gladstone;[37] alongside Goethe's dialogue we find Shakespeare's characters. Too much of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* finds its foundations in the Norwegian Ibsen, the Spaniard Cervantes, the Russian Dostoyevski, and the Italian Dante to speak of anything more than German *accents* in *Ethics*. The work's index of names provides ample proof of its broad base.

Secondly, I would like to draw attention to the socio-political and cultural conservatism which the resistance and Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* had in common. Neither the Wilhelmine Empire (which resulted in World War I) nor the Weimar Republic (which ended in a second catastrophe) offered a viable political concept for the ordering of German society. It seemed that the German resistance had to hark back to before 1870 to find new national foundations. The result was a strong concentration of the German *Bürger* tradition of the nineteenth century, somewhere between Western individualism and Bolshevik collectivism.[38]

Although one should avoid tarring with the same ideological brush the wide mixture of groups which together made up the German resistance, it can be said that the social

utopia of its members showed strong romantic characteristics, generally combining an organic concept of social government with a strongly individualistic concept of man. In additon, the moral and intellectual elite which constituted the resistance opted for an authoritarian rather than a democratic structure of government. Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* shows obvious traces of this conservatism. In his doctrine of mandates he gave a theological justification for a model of government in which *Oben und Unten* ('top and bottom') are clearly disinguished.

In the *Ethics* Bonhoeffer hardly shows himself a model of progressivism from a socio-political point of view and the same can be said of the cultural aspect of the work. His aversion to mass consumer culture, his plea for a quality-elite (which he would develop even further in the Tegel prison[39]) showed Bonhoeffer, yet again more than ever to be a *Bildungsbürger* who lived with the notion of belonging to an intellectual and cultural, albeit, unappreciated social elite. Within ten years time the New York cinemagoer Bonhoeffer, so self-evident in 1931, had become difficult to imagine.

I will not explore any further the elitist conservatism that links Bonhoeffer to the rest of the German resistance. Others have already done so (Larry L. Rasmussen in particular comes to mind[40]) and will continue to do so.

I will deal with a fourth characteristic in slightly more detail. I am here referring to the religious-Christian motives of those involved in the resistance and the related apologetic tendencies of the *Ethics*.

Without exception the German civil resistance against Hitler seemed steeped in Christian motives. Whether one takes Goerdeler, Oster, Beck, von Dohnanyi, or Moltke, all were Christians, even if in a liberal rather than in an eccelesiastical-orthodox sense.[41] Consequently, a vital role was attributed to Christianity in their vision of a post-war Europe. After the nihilism of Nazism, the reconstruction of Europe was to be based upon positive Christian principles. The Ten Commandments were to serve as a foundation for justice, the Christian value of the individual personality as a foundation for society.[42]

In the course of these years, we see a striking reorientation towards the Christian faith in the circles of the anti-fascist *Bildungsbürgertum*, a reorientation aptly illustrated by Thomas Mann. The writer, himself the perfect embodiment of the German *Bildungsbürger*, began his first novel, *Buddenbrooks*, with a catechism smothered in stammer: to the *Bürger* in the process of emancipation, the Christian faith no longer represented a living tradition. Nor does it do so in the early works of Thomas Mann. But after the rise of fascism and his forced flight from Germany in 1933 (first to Switzerland, then to the United States), the same Thomas Mann became both a passionate advocate of the old humanist values of European culture and a defender of the 'Christian foundations of Western civilization.'[43] For (and let me draw your attention to the parallel with Bonhoeffer's paragraph on 'The Church and the World' in *Ethics*): 'Liberty, truth, true reason, human dignity — whence did we create these ideas, ideas that are the mainstay and support of our lives and without which our spiritual existence would disintegrate, if not from Christianity, which made them universal law?'[44]

Starting from this suddenly rediscovered proximity of European culture and Chris-

tianity, which had grown apart over the previous two centuries, Thomas Mann, in his exile in California in 1944, reached the conclusion that a post-war Europe had to be constructed on the foundations of the Christian faith. 'What should be restored first and foremost are the commandments of Christianity, trampled under foot by a false revolution — and from them we must derive the constitution for a future society of the human race to which all must submit.'[45] In this context, secularized humanist values such as liberty and humanity once again acquire a religious connotation. Thomas Mann considered them — and again I must draw attention to the parallel to Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* — 'a most sacred good, which has its origins in the Christian faith.'[46]

Bonhoeffer, too, experienced in the resistance this 'rapprochement' between Christianity and humanist culture. Christ, on the one hand, and righteousness and the righteous on the other, suddenly seem to recognize one another as allies in the face of the nihilistic barbarism of nazism. Bonhoeffer refuses to see this surprising proximity as a mere *Zweckgemeinschaft* — a temporary and accidental alliance against a common enemy. He interpreted it as the return of the citizen, estranged from Christianity and church, to his Christian origins. In the course of two centuries of emancipation and secularization, Christian faith and European culture had grown apart; ten years of resistance brought them back together again. In his *Ethics,* Bonhoeffer extrapolated this 'living, concrete experience' to a general dimension and used it as a model for the whole of European culture.

Christian imperialism mediated by force is out of the question here; we are dealing with a kind of *Aha-Erlebnis* — a mutual recognition, a rediscovery of the origins of European culture in the concrete context of the experience of suffering in the German church struggle and the resistance. This particular Europe once again discovers the range of a universal faith. '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.'[47]

To Bonhoeffer the question was one of temporary 'estrangement', not 'secularization.' A hesitant reorientation towards the Christian faith is promptly labelled a 'return.' 'The children of the church, who had become independent and gone their own ways, now in the hour of danger returned to their mother.'[48] In its finest representatives (the righteous), Europe, face to face with the Void, finds a way back. Europe is the runaway child that finds the way to the Paternal home again.[49]

In *Ethics,* Bonhoeffer took his starting points from a concrete, incontestable experience. And what is more, with this experience he practiced apologetics.[50] The hesitant reorientation of the *Bürger*elite was interpreted by Bonhoeffer as an 'unconscious residue of a former attachment', simply waiting for an awakening of consciousness to become 'attachment' once again. In so doing, Bonhoeffer transgressed the boundary between the factual and the normative. He wished to help the 'righteous' who no longer dared to call himself a Christian 'with much patience to the confession of Christ.'[51] In this way Bonhoeffer hoped to pull him over the threshold of the Christian faith.

The entire *Ethics* is marked by these apologetics. This is especially clear in the sections dealing with cultural history, where Bonhoeffer saw the historical unity of Europe anchored in Jesus Christ ('Inheritance and Decay') — a unity which has been

lost because the West fell away from Jesus Christ and which can only be retrieved through a return to its origins and here Bonhoeffer is thinking in concrete terms of a 'new awakening of the faith.'[52] Bonhoeffer generalized his particular experience of the resistance by laying the moral foundation of a future European political and social order solely in a living Christian faith. Enmity towards Christ, on the other hand, irrevocably leads to the abyss.[53]

Bonhoeffer's concrete ethics are also apologetic in this respect: marriage, work, state, and church can only be fully effective in their specific development and their relationship to each other when founded on their Christian origins. 'It is only from above, with God as the point of departure, that it is possible to say and to understand what is meant by the church, by marriage and the family, by culture and by government,' judged Bonhoeffer in his doctrine of mandates.[54]

Finally, Bonhoeffer's apologetic intentions can be clearly distinguished in the systematic-theological argumentation of the *Ethics*. Time and again, two concepts and their relationship to one another recur in countless variations and in every part of the work: the *Anspruch* (claim, seizure)[55] of Christ on the modern Western world, on the one hand, and the *Eigengesetzlichkeit* (autonomy)[56] which European culture has acquired in the course of the history of its emancipation, on the other. Bonhoeffer, who himself grew up in this tradition of autonomous worldliness, would not retreat beyond it. 'We cannot go back to the days before Lessing and Lichtenberg.'[57] Yet Bonhoeffer wants to understand this world better than it understands itself. 'Real worldliness'[58] is only possible when all life is geared towards and seen in Christ, on whom are founded the unity and the unbreakable bond between God and man, between Christian faith and culture. 'A world which stands by itself, in isolation from the law of Christ, falls victim to the unnatural and the irrational, to presumption and self-will', wrote Bonhoeffer in his paragraph on 'Thinking in Terms of Two Spheres.'[59] But we could have come across this same pronouncement in the chapters on 'Conformation', 'The Ultimate and the Penultimate', and 'The Mandates.' During the years in which he was working on *Ethics,* Bonhoeffer's thinking developed quickly. Time and again he created new theological models.[60] Yet the basic theological intuition behind and within his intellectual flexibility remained constant — the only future for the Christian faith and European culture is a common future, in mutual recognition and influence. Separately, neither has any future in Europe at all. Thus Bonhoeffer returned to the position he had left in 1933: a kind of Christian humanism of the type he had developed in 'Das Recht auf Selbstbehauptung.' And there is one Christian dogma that continually feeds and justifies this basic intuition: the dogma of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.

In the *Ethics,* the incarnation is the theological paradigm through which Bonhoeffer analyzed European culture and with which he justified his Christian apologetics. The incarnation of God made Europe what it was — a historical, political, and cultural unity. A radical rethinking of the consequences of the incarnation is the sole condition for creating the possibility of a future Europe. The incarnation of God is not only the starting point of European history, it is its purpose, its substance, its aim. And now: 'Jesus Christ has made of the West an historical unity... The unity of the West is not an idea but an historical reality, of which the sole foundation is Christ.'[61]

Just like his historical-political views on Europe, Bonhoeffer's ethical humanism is grafted on to the incarnation. Being human is participation in the incarnation of God in this world, in his crucifixion and in his resurrection.[62] Because God became human, the entire creation should be focused on humanity.[63] Because this incarnation of God is a mystery, being human is also a mystery that should not be violated.[64] Jesus is not a human. He is *humanity*. Whatever happens to him happens to man. It happens to all men, and therefore it happens to us. The name Jesus contains within itself the whole of humanity and the whole of God.[65]

Bonhoeffer does not see the incarnation as a prop, a theoretical model for acquiring a deeper understanding of history; the incarnation of God is itself the historical process which has been and will be shaped in Europe — if European humanity does not betray its own Christ-based humanity.

Bonhoeffer's phenomenological description of human life in the *Ethics* is infinitely nuanced and refined. The moral and psychological sketches in his work (I am thinking, for example, of his phenomenology of shame, of conscience, and his description of the structure of the responsible life) are among the greatest Europe has produced. But in their foundation they show a dogmatic solidity — the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the be-all and end-all of European culture.

5

We have placed Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and the attitude towards Europe found in his work in their own particular context. We have read the *Ethics* as a contextual, cultural theology of Europe, historically and geographically confined by the horizon of the German resistance against Hitler in the years 1939-1943. But is the significance of Bonhoeffer's views on Europe therefore limited to that particular European context? Would not a cultural theology for a different Europe (ours, for example) benefit from the *Ethics* ? I would like to close with a few remarks on that question.

5.1. As I said before, reducing the *Ethics* to a context of concrete experience is not a form of sociological reductionism. Bonhoeffer himself did it, and he made a paradoxical discovery in the process: '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.' Precisely in the peculiarity of his European experience Bonhoeffer discovered the universality of Christ. Being faithful to this discovery is being faithful to Bonhoeffer. He commits us to our own particular concrete experience, not his. We therefore must dissociate ourselves from some of the conservative and elitist elements in the *Ethics* which were comprehensible or even justified in their context. Also, it seems to me, the historical analysis of a Western unity created by Christ can no longer be maintained as such.

5.2. Europe, according to the analysis of modern cultural historians, is neither in origin nor in character exclusively Christian. 'One could say that, in an early phase, Islam

shaped Europe by hemming in Christendom (seventh century) and that, in a second phase, Europe shaped *itself* in relation to Islam by driving it back at Poitiers (732),' wrote the sociologist Edgar Morin in his recent work on Europe.[66] Not Christianity, but Islam made Europe what it is.[67] Only the medieval Europe that came into being afterwards could possibly be identified with Christendom. Also, one realizes that in modern times Europe and Christianity no longer totally overlap.[68]

It is a fact that the Europe of the Middle Ages was Christian — and this again leads us to dissociate ourselves from Bonhoeffer's analysis — but it is also a fact that it had been heterogeneous, divided by schism and conflict-ridden from the start. Bonhoeffer's preoccupation with unity ('an old German *Sehnsucht*', as Jürgen Moltmann called it),[70] which is easily understood against the background of a torn Europe, has been replaced by a historical approach which stresses the complexity of the historical evolution of Europe — its antagonisms and complementarities. Europe, again according to Edgar Morin, is a bubbling whirlpool, a 'permanent euroorganizing anarchy.' All that gives shape to Europe divides it, all that divides it gives it shape. It comes into being, develops and confirms itself in a constant state of war with itself. Europe may be a unity, but only a *unitas multiplex*.[71] In a profane, decolonized, and pluralist Europe, the image of a united and Christian Europe can no longer be retained. A contextual cultural theology which reconsiders Europe half a century after Bonhoeffer will appreciate such shifts. When reconsidering the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, one pays more attention to the complexity, the complementarity, the diversity of the relations that shaped Europe than to a personalist Christology geared toward unity.[72] And in a rationalized and secularized world, the idea of the incarnation of God, it seems, must be replaced by a Christology from below, which will stand up to reason. Is not a theology of the incarnation with a God who enters the world from above a relic of a mythical era?

5.3. And yet, I think that we will do no service to theology, Bonhoeffer, or Europe by too quickly trimming our sail to the wind. Bonhoeffer's contribution to European theology in the *Ethics* seems to me to be twofold: perhaps we have become more critical in theological hermeneutics since Bonhoeffer, and distinguish more clearly the incarnation as a model of interpretation of the very reality we interpret; and perhaps philosophy has also become more critical since Bonhoeffer in its use of the word 'humanity'; and we are acquiring a deeper understanding of its linguistic complexity and hidden ideological connotations. But a theology which neither maintains the incarnation as its basic intuition nor links it to the struggle of humanity for humanity is no longer either Christian or relevant.[73] Only a theology which takes the incarnation of God as starting point will be able to make the tradition of European humanism bear fruit, the inheritance of a particular Europe, yet universal in its intentions — as is Christian faith itself.

It will have to be a critical humanism, a humanism which discloses rather than legitimizes power, a humanism in which one person fails to inherit humanity when another does not, a 'humanism of the other man.'[74] In the *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer made a start: 'My life is outside myself, outside the range of my disposal; my life is other than

myself; it is Jesus Christ.' This Christ, who comes to us in the poorest of our brothers, summons us to life in 'selfless self-assertion.'[75] This is Christian humanism at its best. It is about time that we Europeans start taking it seriously — as Bonhoeffer did.

(Translated by Wendela J. Van Santen)

NOTES

1. Quoted by Eberhard Bethge in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologe, Christ, Zeitgenosse*, 5th ed. (Munich, 1983), p. 192.
2. Keith W. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today: Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Bristol, 1984), p. 21; cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. III (Munich, 1972), p. 171.
3. Bethge, p. 835.
4. Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Widerstand in preussischer Tradition?* (offprint from *Kirche in Preussen*, Munich, 1983). Bethge discusses the need for independence in which the Bonhoeffers were brought up, and speaks in this context of the 'non- or altogether anti-Prussian heritage' transmitted to Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
5. Cf. Hans Weil, *Die Entstehung des deutschen Bildungsprinzips, 2nd ed. (Bonn, 1977); F. de Lange, Grond onder de voeten: Burgerlijkheid bij Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Kampen, 1985), pp. 43ff.; idem., *Een burger op z'n best: Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Baarn, 1986).
6. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, p. 192; cf. G.Th. Rothuizen, *Aristocratisch Christendom. Over Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Kampen, 1969).
7. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, p. 85.
8. Regarding the contrast *Kultur-Zivilisation*, see Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilization: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen* vol. I (Frankfurt am Main, 1980).
9. Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I (Munich, 1978), pp. 74ff., (italics mine). In this context, note Bonhoeffer's membership of the extreme nationalist student organization, 'Igel,' and the paramilitary organization 'Schwarze Reichswehr,' short and soon forgotten, and also his nationalist utterances in Barcelona, where he defended the German expansion. See also Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, pp. 55ff., 74ff., and Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol., V, p. 17.
10. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. pp. 180ff.
11. Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. III (Munich, 1966), pp. 258ff.
12. F. Burton Nelson, 'The Relationship of Jean Lasserre to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Peace Concerns in the Struggle of Church and Culture' (unpublished ms, June 1984), p. 9.
13. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. id. pp. 272ff.
14. Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. III, pp. 261-264.
15. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, id. p. 471; cf. Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I, id. p. 61 and vol. II (Munich, 1965), p. 158.
16. Bonhoeffer to Erwin Sutz, May 17, 1932, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I, p. 32. Bonhoeffer calls Europe a 'grotesquely europeanized world' in the same letter in which the situation in Germany seems to him 'so local,' Bonhoeffer to H. Rössler, October 18, 1931, ibid., p. 60.
17. Ibid., p. 61; 'the great death of Christianity.'
18. Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. III, pp. 261-264.
19. Ibid., p. 269.
20. Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. II, p. 79; letter dated August 20, 1933.
21. cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge* (Munich, 1981), p. 238; 'The protest against the world must be accomplished in the world.'
22. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethik* (Munich, 1975), p. 112.
23. *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. II, p. 35.
24. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung* (Munich, 1970), p. 196.
25. Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I, p. 320 (italics mine).

26. Bonhoeffer, 'Nach zehn Jahren' in *Widerstand*, p. 14; cf. *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. II, p. 417, 'The future of Germany has once again become important to me.'
27. Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I, p. 320.
28. George Bell, 'The Background of the Hitler-plot' in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I, pp. 390-398.
29. Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. II, p. 411, letter dated August 26, 1941.
30. See Heinz Eduard Tödt, 'Der Bonhoeffer-Dohnanyi-Kreis in der Opposition und im Widerstand gegen das Gewaltregime Hitlers (Zwischenbilanz eines Forschungsprojekts)' in *Die Präsenz des verdrängten Gottes; Glaube, Religionslosigkeit und Weltverantwortung nach Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Christian Gremmels und Ilse Tödt eds. (Munich, 1987), pp. 205-263.
31. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, pp. 62, 65.
32. Ibid., p. 12.
33. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III/4 (Zürich, 1951), p. 23.
34. See Bonhoeffer, 'Gedanken zu William Paton: *The Church and the New Order*' (1941), *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I, pp. 359ff.
35. Cf. Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins. The German Academic Community 1890-1933* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969).
36. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 107. In the course of these years in the resistance, Bonhoeffer became closely acquainted with these Prussian circles; see Bethge, *Widerstand*, p. 120.
37. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 255.
38. Hans Mommsen, 'Gesellschaftsbild und Verfassungspläne des deutschen Widerstandes' in *Der Deutsche Widerstand gegen Hitler*, eds. Walter Schmitthenner and Hans Buchheim (Berlin, 1966), pp. 73-167.
39. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, pp. 113, 149. See also idem, *Widerstand*, pp. 327-328, and *Fragmente aus Tegel* (Munich, 1978).
40. Larry L. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Reality and Resistance* (Nashville, N.Y., 1972).
41. Cf. Mommsen, pp. 86ff., 118ff.; Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. p. 702; Bonhoeffer, 'Bishop Bell of Chichester' in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I, pp. 375, 394; Tödt, pp. 253ff.
42. Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand*, pp. 164ff. '... that now, on the basis of Christianity, a rebuilding of the life of the nations, internally and externally, is possible.' From letter dated Nov. 27, 1943.
43. Thomas Mann, 'Vom kommenden Sieg der Demokratie' (1938) in *Essays*, vol. II (Frankfurt am Main, 1977), pp. 194-221.
44. Idem, 'Der Problem der Freiheit' (1939) in *Essays*, vol. II, pp. 228-244; cf. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 60.
45. Thomas Mann, 'Schicksal und Aufgabe' (19449 in *Essays*, vol. II, pp. 245-261.
46. Ibid., p. 247; cf. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 53 and *Fragmente*, p. 47.
47. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 62.
48. Ibid., p. 60.
49. cf. ibid., p. 151.
50. Apologetics taken in the sense of a theological account of, and plea for the Christian faith in relation to culture, not as the 'product of fear' Bonhoeffer hated so much; Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. V (Munich, 1972), p. 202; cf. idem, *Widerstand*, p. 358.
51. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 152.
52. Ibid., p. 114.
53. Ibid., p. 115; cf. also idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I, p. 358 on, 'a worldly order, which stays within the confinements of the Ten Commandments.'
54. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 306.
55. See ibid., pp. 51, 53, 54, 90, 151ff., 270ff., 273, 294, 303ff., 316, 354, 369.
56. Ibid., pp. 59, 102, 154, 209, 210, 212, 234, 245, 247, 315, 347, 348, 384.
57. Ibid., p. 104.
58. Ibid., pp. 314ff., 338, 349.
59. Ibid., p. 213.
60. See Clifford J. Green, 'The Text of Bonhoeffer's Ethics' in *New Studies in Bonhoeffer's Ethics*, ed. William J. Peck (Lewiston/Queenston, 1987), pp. 3-66.
61. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 98.
62. Ibid., p. 208.

63. Ibid., pp. 240ff. On Bonhoeffer's personalism, see p. 231.
64. Ibid., pp. 75, 79.
65. Ibid., p. 77.
66. Edgar Morin, *Penser l'Europe* (Paris, 1987), p. 37.
67. Morin speaks of 'Islam as a "Europeanizer,"' ibid., p. 38.
68. Ibid., p. 39.
69. Ibid., p. 40ff.
70. Jürgen Moltmann, *Politische Theologie - Politische Ethik* (Munich, 1984), p. 22.
71. Morin, pp. 27, 48.
72. Cf., e.g., Jürgen Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes: Zur Gotteslehre* (Munich, 1980) on this general reorientation towards the doctrine of the Trinity.
73. Cf. Denis de Rougemont, *Lettre Ouverte aux Européens* (Paris, 1970), p. 47. Rougemont considers the idea of the incarnation and the absolute value of the human being as fundamental options for a European culture.
74. Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (Paris, 1972).
75. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 234.

Europe as Heritage

CHRISTIAN OCCIDENT OR DIVIDED CONTINENT?

H.D. van Hoogstraten

Can modern Europe, in light of its development, be qualified as *christliches Abendland,* in which Jewish and Christian values and norms play — at least implicitly — a leading role? I shall attempt a modest contribution to the answer to this complicated question. Bonhoeffer's view of Europe as inheritance and decay is comparable to the growing insight that the world is governed by an economic system which begins with values which are utterly different from 'the basic concepts of the Hebrew Bible, that increasingly pervade the world-culture.'[1]

Bonhoeffer's response to Europe as the Christian Occident was manifestly positive in several places in his *Ethics*. He also described it as being threatened, with particular reference to the historical context in which he found himself.

In this essay, I will first give a description of those areas where Bonhoeffer lays greatest emphasis. I especially want to discuss the cultural-historical essay 'Inheritance and Decay' ('Erbe und Verfall'), although several other parts of his *Ethics* will be discussed as well.

Second, I will attempt to analyse the significance of the divide running through Europe — the Iron Curtain — the division between two world-controlling economic systems, as well as their political influence. This analysis is directed and delimited by the ideological and religious character of these two systems which also forms a part of the inheritance of Europe as Christian Occident!

Although we live in a different age than Bonhoeffer, we ask a common question: To what extent does a 'Christian Occident' still exist in modern times? Western society has been profoundly transformed by the Enlightenment. Bonhoeffer, however, is ambivalent toward this transformation because the content of the incontrovertible reality of Christ is not easy to find in times of reversal and revolutionary change.

This is the basic problem that we have in common. As I will attempt to demonstrate, a tension also exists for us which Bonhoeffer hardly addresses, but which can be considered and dealt with through the use of Bonhoeffer's approach to faith and reality, i.e., his theological method. The tension is that which is conquering the world like a new religion ('economic religion'[2]). This tension is not at all self-evident; it is only revealed as a result of certain fundamental theological decisions. Here we can learn from Bonhoeffer: if we want to develop theological ethics, the way of decision must be chosen.

So-called 'business ethics' serves as an example of the inextricable mixing of capitalism and Christianity without engaging in the fundamental reflection which I have in mind. The increasing popularity, on a personal level, of simple and naive ethical solutions to very complicated problems of a structural nature can be seen in such business ethics. A word of warning, however, is necessary. The theological