

BONHOEFFER'S COMMUNICATIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OTHER: A RHETORIC OF RECONCILIATION

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Abstract

The emphasis of this writing is to review the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theological and philosophical work to provide a lens to view one's fellow man in a world of division to arrive at a framework for a rhetoric of reconciliation. Reconciliation may broadly be considered as the repairing, restoring, and mending of that which has been broken, namely relationships be they interpersonal, communal, or national due to some type of conflict between two parties. This project seeks to establish a Rhetoric of Reconciliation as a narratively constructed ethical communicative praxis to cause peace and stability. Dietrich Bonhoeffer—pastor, theologian, and scholar—provides a perspective of reconciliation that is grounded in Christian narrative that privileges significant change through both thought and action. From Bonhoeffer's perspective, one cannot begin to discuss morals, ethics, or even justice from a purely humanistic starting point, which is the case with sociological, scientific and political views, but rather one must first begin with God. Bonhoeffer directs our attention to the transcendent reality of a creator God from whom we derive a starting point of how we are to understand the human condition. Furthermore, we gain insight through the ongoing

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narrative of God's interaction with humanity to develop a sense of how we are supposed to live, which is manifested in humanity's reconciliation with God and subsequently with one another in community.

A rhetoric of reconciliation is a communicative praxis narratively situated to cause peace and stability after conflict is terminated. Reconciliation seeks to restore justice and communal order, repair broken relationships, heal communities, and provide an atmosphere for stability and safety. At the heart of reconciliation lies a necessity of dialogue to facilitate the principal aspects of repair that are necessary to establish or reestablish relationships between conflicting parties. A rhetoric of reconciliation requires an identification of pertinent channels of communication, the moral and ethical ground from which dialogue can ensue, and the pragmatic reciprocity that enable the process of reconciliation to steady its course to the attainment of restoration of that which had been lost, namely community. Bar-Tal and Bennink suggest that reconciliation addresses “changing the motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions of the great majority of the society members regarding the conflict”². To change motivations, goals, beliefs and attitudes requires a communicative process that merges previous narrative structures into a new narrative that undergirds the communal stability for the present and future.

Montville recommends that conflict resolution and reconciliation involves a “transactional” dialogue wherein, “both sides must come to some agreement on the situation at hand; the historical event itself, including the

² Daniel Bar-Tal. “From Intractable Conflict through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: Psychological Analysis”. *Political Psychology*, 21, 2, 2000, pp. 351-365.

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details of the event and who was involved; the wounds; and the acceptance of moral responsibility”³. The transactional engagement of involved parties sets the parameters for ongoing dialogue to work out issues related to the conflict and sets the foundation for how the relationship(s) can emerge anew. However, what is communicated and subsequently enacted contains pragmatic stipulations that must be addressed. Theorists agree that trauma, justice, acknowledgement, forgiveness and social assimilation are issues of concern that can impede the progression of reconciliation if left unattended. The trauma of the experience, justice being served, the acknowledgement of the offense, a process of forgiveness of both victim(s) and perpetrator(s), and social assimilation of all parties involved into the broader communal environment are necessary aspects of any reconciliatory process⁴.

³ Joseph V. Montville. “Justice and the Burden of History”, *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence*. Abu-Nimar, ed. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001.

⁴ Yehudith Auerbach. “The Role of Forgiveness in Reconciliation”. *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*. Bar-Simoan-Tov, Yaacov, ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004. Nigel Biggar. “Making Peace or Doing Justice: Must We Choose?” *Burying the Past*, Nigel Biggar, ed. Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C., 2007. David Crooker. “Reckoning with Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework” in *Dilemmas of Reconciliation: Cases and Concepts*, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003. R. Janoff-Bulman. *Shattered Assumptions*. Free Press, NY, 1992. Tom Keating. “What Can Others Do? Foreign Governments and the Politics of Peacebuilding, *Dilemmas of Reconciliation: Cases and Concepts*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Ontario, 2003. Herbert C. Kelman. “Reconciliation as Identity Change: A Social-Psychological Perspective”, *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*. Yaacov Bar-Simoan-Tov, ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004. Desmond Tutu. *No Future without Forgiveness*, Random House, NY: 1997. Miroslav Volf. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. Everett L. Worthington. *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*. Taylor & Francis Group, NY, 2006.

The actual events and constituents involved in conflict can range from interpersonal, moral and criminal offenses to national and international infractions of human rights, genocide, and civil and national war. However, when the conflict has ended, what ought to occur? What direction does life take for those involved in the conflict? How is the potential for conflict to resurface curtailed? The answer to these questions for many theorists is reconciliation. "In its simplest form, reconciliation means restoring friendships and harmony between the rival sides after *conflict resolution*, or transforming relations of hostility and resentment to friendly and harmonious ones"⁵. The goal of reconciliation is not the end of conflict, for it is at the end of conflict when the process of reconciliation begins. The often long and tedious climb to recovering, rebuilding and reestablishing a sense of order is the murky process of reconciliation.

Reconciliation theorists, however, differ on their approach to how reconciliation is to be achieved. Some theorists contend that a judicial process is the primary aspect of reconciliation; they frame their theories upon a restorative justice model.⁶ Social-Psychological theorists take as their starting point an emphasis upon the trauma and social disconnection that are incurred by the victim(s)

⁵ Louis Kriesberg. "Coexistence and the Reconciliation of Communal Conflicts", *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*, E. Weiner, ed., Continuum, New York, 1998.

⁶ Biggar, 7. Bar-Siman-Tov, 12. Jean Bethke Elshtain. "Politics and Forgiveness", *Burying the Past*, Nigel Biggar, ed. Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C., 2007. Hugo van der Merwe. "National and Community Reconciliation: Competing Agendas in South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission", *Burying the Past*, Nigel Biggar, ed. Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C., 2007. Julian V. Roberts. "Public Opinion, Crime, and Criminal Justice" *Crime and Justice*, 16, 99-180, 1992.

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and focus on the cognitive processes that must happen in the individual, victim and perpetrator, as well as the community in which the crime has occurred.⁷ Religious theorists respond to reconciliation from the perspective of the divine and move toward the moral and finally to the ethical reciprocity that ought to occur among humanity in light of the template offered by narratively situated implications of sacred texts. The emphasis of this work is to review the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theological and philosophical work to provide a lens to view one's fellow man in a world of division to arrive at a framework of a rhetoric of reconciliation. Bonhoeffer begins with a conversation of the human condition informed by the biblical narrative and moves to construct a model of a reconciled community, which he embodied in his short-lived life.

The historical context of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life entailed his home country, Germany, trying to recover from a war and reestablish its identity, dignity and power. In its attempt to recover, however, Germany was lead into a historical period of darkness with the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. The attempted extermination of the Jewish people, the engulfing of the church into submission to Hitler, the invasion of Austria and war with Russia as well as the Second World War were the political, social, military, and ecclesial situations with which Bonhoeffer contended with. This historical climate within which Bonhoeffer lived provided the landscape and background from which he would develop a theology and philosophy that addressed the massive injustice.

Central to Bonhoeffer's thought is his dissertation *Sanctorum Communio* in which Bonhoeffer investigates

⁷Worthington, 3.

the “social intention of revelation.”⁸ In this inaugural work, Bonhoeffer explores such issues as the concept of person and the relation to the other, Christian freedom of being-free-for, vicarious representation, and the reciprocal relationship of humanity in light of Christ and the divine-human encounter in history.⁹ Bonhoeffer develops his research of a Christological understanding of the church through employing social philosophy and sociology as tools of theology. In the preface of *Sanctorum Communio* Bonhoeffer wrote,

This work belongs not to the discipline of sociology of religion, but to theology. The issue of a Christian social philosophy and sociology is a genuinely theological one, because it can be answered only on the basis of an understanding of the church. The more this investigation has considered the significance of the sociological category for theology, the more clearly has emerged the social intention of all the basic Christian concepts. ‘Person’, ‘primal state’, ‘sin’, and ‘revelation’ can be fully comprehended only in reference to sociality.¹⁰

A theological sociality is decisive for Bonhoeffer due to his positing of Christ being present within the church. The church constitutes the revelation of God through Christ where word and sacrament bind believers in love. “The reality of the church is the reality of revelation, a

⁸ Clifford Green. ‘Human Sociality in Bonhoeffer’s Theology’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. DeGruchy. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1999.

⁹ Green, 2.

¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

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reality that essentially must be believed or denied. There is no relation to Christ in which the relation to the church is not necessarily established as well.”¹¹ The prescriptive role of the church in the world and the subsequent ethical regard one ought to have toward another is consistent in Bonhoeffer’s writing, teaching and life. To ascertain Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the human to human ethical regard, his theological and Christological basis is necessary.

For Bonhoeffer, creation is the will of God to bring about what is out of nothing at all. “In the beginning—that is, out of freedom, out of nothing—God created heaven and earth.”¹² It is out of God’s freedom that God chooses to create and create out of nothing. God speaks and by speaking God creates through the word. The word of God—*logos*—is the command of God through which the will of God is carried out. “That God creates by the word means that creation is God’s order or command, and that this command is free.”¹³ Because God creates out of freedom, God is not bound by or bound to what God creates. However, out of this same freedom God binds God to what God creates and through the word upholds creation. “Thus the world is upheld only by the one who is its Creator and only for the one who is the Creator. It is upheld not for its own sake but because of God’s look.”¹⁴

God’s look is that gaze that God makes upon what God created and determined that it was good. This look

¹¹ *Sanctorum Communio*, 120.

¹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

¹³ *Creation and Fall*, 42.

¹⁴ *Creation and Fall*, 48.

continues, according to Bonhoeffer, even in a fallen world, hence the act of reconciliation by Christ. “And because of God’s look, with which God embraces God’s work and does not let it go, we live.”¹⁵ God’s look and determination of “it is good” is what causes creation to be good and not what is created being good in and of itself. Furthermore, a Christological lens of creation causes Bonhoeffer to conclude that God’s look is not limited to creation in its pre-fallen state, but continues. The evidence for this is found in Christ through whom God was reconciling the world back to God’s self.¹⁶ However, the reconciliatory act through Christ was necessary due to the change in the human condition in relation to the Creator.

The apex of God’s creation is humanity who is created in God’s image by virtue of God’s will. A distinctive turn takes place with the creation of humanity in that God becomes involved. According to the Genesis account, when God created humanity, God “fashioned humankind out of the dust from the ground and blew into its nostrils the breath of life.”¹⁷ To this fashioning, Bonhoeffer responds that God expresses two complementary principles. It expresses both the physical nearness of the creator to humanity as well as the omnipotence of the Creator.¹⁸ While everything else that was created was done by the word of God, for humanity God gave of God’s self through the shaping, forming and breathing life into this new creature. Bonhoeffer writes, “Human beings do not live as human beings apart from

¹⁵ *Creation and Fall*, 47.

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:19, NIV. Zondervan. *The New International Translation of The Holy Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2008.

¹⁷ *Creation and Fall*, 72.

¹⁸ *Creation and Fall*, 73.

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God's spirit. To live as a human being means to live as a body in the spirit"¹⁹.

The human's existence varies from all other living creatures in that it bears the spirit of God, which constitutes its *Geist* or essential being. Therefore, humanity bears within itself an essence that is directly from God and part of God, a likeness of God. Additionally, humanity created in the image of God to the extent that they are created in freedom. Freedom in a biblical sense, Bonhoeffer notes, is not something that is tangible, nor is it attainable in isolation or developed as an ability. "For in the language of the Bible, freedom is not something that people have for themselves; but something they have for others. No one is free in himself or herself [*an sich*]." ²⁰ Freedom is a relation between persons wherein one finds freedom in "being-free-for-the-other"²¹, bound intrinsically to the other and in relation with the other.

For Bonhoeffer, this is a Christological understanding of the primal state of humanity. The primal state is prior to humanity's encounter with the serpent through which the human condition forever changes. Prior to the fall, Adam's life was characteristic of "utterly unbroken and unified obedience, that is, Adam's innocence and ignorance of disobedience."²² Adam was given a prohibition, which points out Adam's

¹⁹ *Creation and Fall*, 74.

²⁰ *an sich* for Bonhoeffer is: "In herself" or "in himself" in the sense of being independent of any particular context. It is not a freedom in and of itself, not the freedom of being-in-and-of-itself; instead this freedom occurs always between two people. It is the freedom of being-for-the-other, of being-from-the-other, at any time.

²¹ *Creation and Fall*, 62.

²² *Creation and Fall*, 78.

limit, a limit that is at the center of the garden. The prohibition involves what Adam cannot do or his limit; eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. On the other hand, according to Bonhoeffer, the prohibition also points out Adam's freedom, that is "free for and free from."²³ Adam is provided his limit and addressed as a creature that is bound to his creatureliness as well as existence. This creature, Adam, is free to eat of anything in the garden with one exception, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. To this Bonhoeffer asserts that "the human being's limit is at the center of human existence, not on the margin; the limit or constraint that people look for on the margin of humankind is the limit of the human condition...the limit of what is possible for humanity. The boundary that is at the center is the limit of human reality."²⁴ The limit or boundary is for the benefit of humanity through the grace of the Creator for in the primal state humanity had no knowledge of good and evil and therefore the relationship between the created and creator was in perfect harmony. The harmony is attributed to the lack of comprehension of the two-sided dilemma and choice between good and evil. "Adam lives in the strictest sense beyond good and evil; that is, Adam lives out of the life that comes from God."²⁵ This life that has been created and sustained by God is lived in communion with the creator. The reciprocal situation occurs in the relationship between humans.

Adam was living free from and free for, that constitutes living a harmonious relationship with Eve. Bonhoeffer suggests that the creator knows that this free creature that has been created with limits can bear the

²³ *Creation and Fall*, 79.

²⁴ *Creation and Fall*, 79.

²⁵ *Creation and Fall*, 81.

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limit only if it is loved, therefore the creator creates a suitable helper for Adam. “The helper who is a partner had to be at once the embodiment of Adam’s limit and the object of Adam’s love. Indeed, love for the woman was now to be the human being’s very life (in the deepest sense of the word.”²⁶ Bonhoeffer posits the relationship between Adam and Eve in the primal state as the foundation for understanding community in that they [Adam and Eve] constitute the first community. The community is constitutive of being free from and being free for one another to share in the limit.

The community is inclusive of belonging to one another in intimate relationship without shame. “The man and woman were both naked and the felt no shame.”²⁷ Shame arises only when the knowledge of good and evil, *tob* and *ra*, enter upon the scene. *Tob* and *ra* are the ultimate split and are “concepts that express what is in every respect the deepest divide in human life.”²⁸

Shame comes out of humankind’s knowledge of dividedness and difference. After the fall, both Adam and Eve’s eyes were open and they saw that they were naked and attempted to cover themselves with fig leaves. Disobedience by humanity gave to way shame due to the knowledge of difference. Bonhoeffer wrote, “Shame arises only out of the knowledge of humankind’s dividedness, of the world’s dividedness in general, and

²⁶ *Creation and Fall*, 89.

²⁷ Genesis 2:25, NIV.

²⁸ *Tob* and *ra* are Hebrew words, each having a range of meanings. *Tob* means “good, pleasing, pleasant, delightful, delicious, happy, glad, joyful” while *ra* means “bad, evil, disagreeable, displeasing, unpleasant, harmful”. Bonhoeffer used these terms to designate exact opposites similar to pleasure and pain or happy and unhappy. Bonhoeffer asserts that this is the deepest divide of humanity with God and subsequently with other humans. *Creation and Fall*, 98.

thus also of one's own dividedness. Shame expresses the fact that we no longer accept the other as God's gift."²⁹ Shame therefore becomes the rationale for covering and hiding of the self's evil as well as questioning of the other's motives. The dividedness caused by disobedience created a disillusionment of the self no longer being free from and free for, but rather ashamed of oneself. Bonhoeffer suggests, "It [shame] also expresses the knowledge that goes along with this that the other person too is no longer content to belong to me but desires to get something from me."³⁰ Therefore, the dividedness contributes to the other no longer being accepted and appreciated as helper, but now viewed as one who wants something for helping.

Bonhoeffer makes a distinction between shame and remorse through suggesting that remorse arises when a person knows they have been at fault for something. However, shame on the other hand is a result of knowing that he/she lacks something.³¹ Bonhoeffer states, "The peculiar fact that we lower our eyes when a stranger's eye meets our gaze is not a sign of remorse for a fault, but a sign of that shame which, when it knows that it is seen, is reminded of something that it lacks, namely, the lost wholeness of life, its own nakedness."³² Shame seeks to be covered and hidden, hence Adam and Eve's action of making covering to hide their nakedness. Humanity attempts to conceal and cover themselves from one another and from God. Bonhoeffer asserts that the concealment is "a necessary

²⁹ *Creation and Fall*, 91.

³⁰ *Creation and Fall*, 91.

³¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Ethics*. Trans. Neville Horton Smith. NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1955.

³² *Ethics*, 26.

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sign of the actual situation of disunion.”³³ However, the mask of concealment is not a disguise of deception, but rather a covering of the longing for the reconciliation of the lost unity with the origin of life.³⁴ The dialectic of concealment and exposure covering and revelation become the essence of a life of disunity from God and from men. “Self knowledge is now the measure and the goal of life.”³⁵ Life for humanity becomes a continual conflict with others and even more profoundly with the self. The knowledge of good and evil creates a divided self from which reality and understanding emanates. The knowledge of self is no longer derived from the creator, but from the self and therefore it is from the self that God and others are understood.

The human predicament is that of humanity being in disunion with God and with others and as such all things are in disunion. Bonhoeffer asserts that due to humankind’s disunion with God that conflict arises in all things that are in opposition with one another. Bonhoeffer wrote, “what is and what should be, life and law, knowledge and action, idea and reality, reason and instinct, duty and inclination, conviction and advantage, necessity and freedom...truth, justice, beauty and love come into opposition with one another”³⁶. These constitute a plethora of oppositions that are a result of the knowledge of good and evil. Bonhoeffer’s theological disposition is that every individual is a part of the sinful solidarity of humanity and therefore “all humanity falls with each sin, and not one of us is in principle different

³³ *Ethics*, 28.

³⁴ *Ethics*, 28.

³⁵ *Ethics*, 30.

³⁶ *Ethics*, 29.

from Adam; that is, everyone is also the “first” sinner”³⁷. The sinfulness is result of the knowledge of good and evil that created disunity with God and thus the loss of community. The striving of the individual against self and others is an ongoing attempt to overcome the disunity, however feeble the attempt may be. The attempt to overcome from the knowledge of self—divided self—as the center of knowledge falls short of rectifying the tragedy of sin.

The overcoming of the disunity is the reconciliation of humans with themselves, which is only possible through being reconciled to God. It is a rediscovery of the unity lost by virtue of the overcoming of evil on the cross that extends forgiveness of guilt and reconciliation of a fallen creation with the creator. The divided self creates conflict within, which permeates outward within the community. When an ethical choice is at hand, conflict arises. When there is conflict, either within the individual or between individuals, a judgment must be made and “the judge is the knowledge of good and evil; he is man.”³⁸ The judgment that is enacted is done from a self-righteousness that is credited from the self and the self’s knowledge. Reconciliation is the overcoming of the disunity that was wrought by the fall of man in disobedience to the creator. “The new knowledge of the reconciliation which is accomplished in Jesus, the knowledge of voiding of the disunion, itself entirely voids man’s own knowledge of his own goodness.”³⁹ The individual’s own goodness is obliterated along with the judgment of others; therefore, humanity’s knowledge of

³⁷ *Sanctorum Communio*, 115.

³⁸ *Ethics*, 30.

³⁹ *Ethics*, 38.

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self-goodness can impede unity for the disunity has not been overcome.

Faithfulness in a Flawed Community

Community, for Bonhoeffer, can only be understood from the perspective of both the person and the community, for both are at the same time realized and actualized through ethical encounters.⁴⁰ Community does not exist without the individual and the individual does not exist without community. In the primal state, man was created by God and in the same community was created. "Community with God by definition establishes social community...neither exists without the other."⁴¹ Unmediated community was established between man and woman who were bare to one another in the primal state. In *being-for* one another, humanity constituted community that the individual was only realized in relation to the other. Their communicative interaction was not obstructed by barriers of desire nor curtailed by shame. However, disunity because of sin ruptured the unmediated community⁴². Community after the fall has attempted to overcome the disunity through ethical practices of social interaction and action from a self-centered knowledge rather than from a unity with God. Hence, Bonhoeffer's rejection of deriving social community from a purely epistemological framework and argues for an understanding of community in relation to a Christological hermeneutic of person and community in tandem.⁴³

⁴⁰ *Sanctorum Communio*, 62.

⁴¹ *Sanctorum Communio*, 64.

⁴² *Sanctorum Communio*, 63.

⁴³ *Sanctorum Communio*, 45.

A sociological perspective of community may be defined as a group of interacting people living in a common location and often organized around similar values, beliefs and a shared worldview. A psychological perspective of community abandons the necessity of common location to develop a “‘sense of community’ whereby ‘membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection”⁴⁴ create a community. These definitions ground community with the self as center and humanity as constituents that create community through achieving similarity based upon shared perceptions. Bonhoeffer argues that such a construction of community places the intellect of the individual as responsible for determining community.⁴⁵ Furthermore, such an idealist construction denotes the individual as having a spirit [*geist*]⁴⁶ of *being-for-itself* through attribution of absolute value to humanity rather than to God.⁴⁷ Furthermore, it designates trying to understand oneself from oneself.⁴⁸ The epistemological idealism of Kant that Bonhoeffer argues against suggests that community is achieved through a transcendence of the individual through knowledge of the universal. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer insisted that there is no

⁴⁴ Bar-Tal, 332.

⁴⁵ *Sanctorum Communio*, 45.

⁴⁶ Often used to denote God, Holy Spirit and absolute spirit. Bonhoeffer uses *geist* in anthropological terms. In German it is a complex term closely associated to the English phrase “the spirit of a person”.

⁴⁷ *Sanctorum Communio*, 49.

⁴⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic*

Theology. Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., ed., H. Martin Rumscheidt, trans. Fortress Press, MN, 1996.

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cognitive way to reach such a point in knowledge or to ever arrive at an understanding of real existence of the other.⁴⁹ Therefore, an attempt to construct community through intellectual endeavors leaves the task unaccomplished.

The Christological approach to constructing community begins with a transcendence of the individual by God, rather than the universal. "The human person originates only in relation to the divine; the divine person transcends the human person, who both resists and is overwhelmed by the divine."⁵⁰ However, the individual does not exist in isolation, but others must necessarily be present. The reality of the other is not brought into understanding unless and until there is an ethical encounter that places a demand on the self in a moment of responsibility. When the acknowledgement of the ethical barrier is made, the first step toward basic ethical relationships begins.⁵¹ The I-You basic social relation that Bonhoeffer here constructs only comes to fruition in relation to the divine. The I can only be understood in relation to God and the You can only be acknowledged through that same recognition of the divine. Nevertheless, the I is not an I until encountered by God as I.⁵² Bonhoeffer is asserting that the I-You relation comes about only after God enters a person as an I. "God or the Holy Spirit joins the concrete You; only through God's active working does the other become a You to me from whom my I arises."⁵³ Therefore, every You is the image of God and to acknowledge the You as

⁴⁹ *Act and Being*, 45.

⁵⁰ *Act and Being*, 49.

⁵¹ *Act and Being*, 51.

⁵² *Act and Being*, 52.

⁵³ *Act and Being*, 50.

the image of God, every social encounter places a unique ethical demand on the I to engage the You as such, rather than from any other perspective. Community arises from the communicative interaction of the I and You. The Christian I-You is different from an empirical I-You relation in that the You is known as an alien You as an ethical barrier rather than known through the revelation of God.⁵⁴ The Christian perspective approaches the You as an individual with value and worth, who like the I, is made in the image of God. In an empirical sense, the You is perceived as an obstacle; as an ethical situation that a conscious decision must be made to reject, ignore or engage. Bonhoeffer argues that for the Christian to reject or ignore the You cannot be an option, for the understanding of the self is tied to the community of which the You is a part. The entire social interaction is the foundation for community substantiated upon the revelation of God. "God's being is not in transcendent isolation and absence. God is free for humanity in our history; that is, in the light of Jesus Christ, God is revealed as present to us in the world—God's being is being-in-relation-to-us. This is the meaning of incarnation: God with us, and God for us."⁵⁵ God being-in-relation-to-us is the restoration of the primal understanding of man being-free-for the other in community. The revelation of God through Christ is the word of God that calls the dis-united man to reconciliation with God and subsequently to humanity. The God-human relationship through Christ is the model relationship that directs the Christian's interaction with and respect for the other. The God-human-human interaction becomes the basis for Bonhoeffer's sociality.

⁵⁴ *Act and Being*, 66.

⁵⁵ Green, 155.

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Community is a holistic construct derivative of communicative interactions. “Only in reciprocal interaction with other minds is self-conscious thinking and willing possible and meaningful.”⁵⁶ The phenomenon of language is the conduit for the combination of thought and emotion that creates the meaningful interaction between humans. Language is an overcoming of the ethical barrier that the meeting of the I and You creates. The linguistic exchange provides the transmission of meaning of thought to the other. The objectivity as well as subjectivity of communication comprising the human nature or human spirit that is only actualized in sociality.⁵⁷ Through the interactions of individuals constitutes the consciousness of the existence of the I and the ethical demand of the You. Wherever the interaction occurs community exists and due to human nature, at the point of the ethical demand conflict can arise.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer argues, “Only in strife with other wills, in subjecting these to one’s own will or being subjected, is strength and richness of will developed.”⁵⁹ The conflict that Bonhoeffer at this point is discussing is a healthy conflict that builds community and establishes societal bonds between individuals. The strength that comes as a result of interaction is established on the basis of perception of the other as being made in the image of God. As such, a community is the partaking of the reality of God in the world and with the other.

Community is maintained through the ongoing engagement of the self with the other mediated by discourse that ensues when an ethical demand is placed

⁵⁶ *Sanctorum Communio*, 69.

⁵⁷ *Sanctorum Communio*, 66.

⁵⁸ *Sanctorum Communio*, 72.

⁵⁹ *Sanctorum Communio*, 73.

upon the other and the other determines the response.⁶⁰ The communicative exchange hinges upon the willingness of the You to view and accept the I—as different as the two may be—as being the image of God. Community is possible due to the reciprocity of reconciliation that those who have accepted the grace of God through Christ recognize as their responsibility as citizens of the church community.⁶¹ Thus, Bonhoeffer's construction of community is where the individual lives an existence of being-free-from and being-free-for others. In *Creation and Fall* Bonhoeffer suggests that no one is free in and of themselves, but freedom is something that they have for others. Bonhoeffer argues, "Freedom is a relation between two persons. Being free means 'being-free-for-the-other', because I am bound to the other. Only by being in relation with the other am I free."⁶² This concretizes the notion of society being established upon a foundation of mutual respect, and concern for the other that is not predicated upon some hedonistic or self-serving principles. Society ought to be governed by the understanding of interdependence whereby 'I' need 'You' in order to not only survive but also be become a person of my fullest potential. Bonhoeffer suggested, "the I cannot exist without the You, nor can it exist without the human race."⁶³ However, when the members of the society do not share the sentiments of social reciprocity, the ties that bind become the cords of strangulation. Society becomes entangled within the plethora of a multiplicity of competing, often disgruntled voices that vie

⁶⁰ *Sanctorum Communio*, 68.

⁶¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

⁶² *Creation & Fall*, 62.

⁶³ *Sanctorum Communio*, p.117.

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for attention and power. A fragmented and splintered society no longer functions as an Aristotelian 'we' but as a modern 'I'. Such a society is unable to stand united on fronts of social injustice if the injustice does not have a direct effect on the individual. Furthermore, 'neighbor' is only a geographic location of a person or families living in close proximity, rather than extended members of the human family who are worthy of interaction care, respect and love.

Societies that allow their personal differences, be they cultural, religious, or racial, to be of more importance than the commonalities will ultimately have discontent. Bonhoeffer provides a template for how we can take our main focus off of difference and begin meaningful conversations, which ought to lead to positive actions, based upon our commonness of being made in the image of God. This is not to say that our various religious dispositions and beliefs are to be castigated for some utopian dream or singular world religion. Theological beliefs are the foundations providing stability, guidance and understanding for how to navigate life. The request being made is not of relinquishment, but of openness—openness to the other regardless of their religion, culture, ethnicity, gender, ability, dis-ability and other various dividing designations.

The reconciliation of man to God through Christ is given as the solution to a fallen self-centered world. The act of reconciliation on the cross by Christ reestablishes the relationship that was destroyed at the fall. The individual is no longer captive to internal and external conflict by virtue of personal disunity, but is now free-from and free-to. Furthermore, the I no longer views You as an obstacle to be overcome, but views the other as made in the image of God. This perception of the other is foundational for a rhetoric of reconciliation. Therefore, Bonhoeffer's understanding of the human condition and

the propensity to be reconciled to God and one another provides a groundwork from which a new perspective of the other can ensue. Though Bonhoeffer operates from a strictly Christological approach, that does not mean persons of other faiths and belief systems cannot institute his thought. However, Bonhoeffer must not be confused with arguing for a theory of utilitarianism, for he situates the good as only being conceivable in and through Christ. Furthermore, his ethical construct is developed and actualized within a particular historical context, which holds viable consideration for the ethical choices that are made.

Bonhoeffer's framework of reconciliation takes a further step in demanding that discourse not remain linguistic propaganda. For Bonhoeffer, again in line with a guiding biblical narrative, the theoretical and theological have to be actualized in every day life and encounters. One has to be willing to provide acts of grace and compassion to others regardless of who the other is.⁶⁴ The motivation to do so cannot be predicated upon the expectation of something in return—that would constitute a self-centered life. Rather, the motivation to live out an ethic of responsibility is founded upon the grace that has been given in the reconciliatory act of Christ. Through his final days of life Bonhoeffer continued to call to the church-community to be the church that accepted the responsibility of providing for and suffering with those in need.⁶⁵ It was a call to take a stand in the face of adversity and lay down one's life for the "least of these."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Discipleship*, 81.

⁶⁵ Peter Selby. 'Christianity in a World Come of Age' in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. DeGruchy. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1999.

⁶⁶ Matthew 25:45, NIV.

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Reconciliation from this vantage takes on the willingness to stand up for others who are suffering adversity. Furthermore, it is being empathetic and sympathetic to the extent of taking the pragmatic step of doing for the other what the other is incapable of doing or oppressed for attempting.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's convictions lead to his hanging in a concentration camp at the age of 39. His life and his work provide a rich complexity of thought, dedication, and faith that continues to reverberate more than fifty years after his murder. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's contributions to the present day is a resounding call for humanity to be reconciled to God and to one another; for the church-community to be the community willing to not only talk about reconciliation, but to actualize Christian rhetorical discourse in ethical responsibility for those who suffer.

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