

Joy in the Sermon:
Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christological Preaching

Amy Rowe

RW749-OL Capstone

August 26, 2021

Joy in the Sermon:
Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christological Preaching

Introduction

So essential was preaching to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ministry that Vicki Barnett, the general editor of his published works in English, writes, "I do not think that we can understand Bonhoeffer the resistance figure or Bonhoeffer the theologian without understanding Bonhoeffer the preacher."¹ Despite the significance of preaching in Bonhoeffer's thought and life, however, he is not often remembered as a preacher.² Where his sermons have been assembled and studied, they are more often treated as evidence of his political and theological development than as proclamation in the context of the church. This approach may be conditioned by the radical "religionless Christianity" about which Bonhoeffer wrote in his later prison letters, which has been popularly misunderstood as Bonhoeffer's eschewal of traditional church ministry.³ A study of Bonhoeffer's Christology, however, corrects this misconception and reveals that his vision of a religionless future for the church was coherent with his understanding of the person of Christ. To Bonhoeffer, a "religionless Christianity" was a call to church renewal and repentance, of clearing

¹ Vicki Barnett, foreword to *The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. Isabel West (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), Scribd ebook, 10. Similarly, Bonhoeffer's student, close friend, and posthumous biographer Eberhard Bethge writes that "the Bonhoeffer who taught, the Bonhoeffer who was obedient to the Word, the Bonhoeffer who was involved, was governed by preaching and its majesty." Quoted in Clyde E. Fant, *Worldly Preaching, with Bonhoeffer's Finkenwalde Lectures on Homiletics* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1975), 3.

² This is commented upon in many volumes; see, for example, Edwin H. Robinson, translator's preface to *Christ the Center* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 7. In recent American understanding of Bonhoeffer, Eric Metaxas' popular but flawed biography looms large. Its subtitle, "Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy," is typical in its casting of Bonhoeffer primarily as activist, not preacher.

³ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, ed. Vicki Barnett, trans. Eric Mosbacher, Peter and Betty Ross, Frank Clarke, and William Glen-Doepel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 881-2.

away all that might obscure the profound reality of Christ's presence in the world,⁴ a presence wholly "for us" (*pro nobis*). This Christ-for-us is most powerfully conveyed through the church's proclamation.

Bonhoeffer's Christological vision of proclamation is evident throughout his sermons,⁵ but is articulated most clearly and systematically in the homiletics lectures he delivered between 1935-1937 at the seminary in Finkenwalde. His second lecture captures this Christological vision well: "The proclaimed word is not a medium of expression for something else, something which lies behind it, but rather it is the Christ himself walking through the congregation as the Word."⁶ Statements like these reveal the extent to which Bonhoeffer's theology of preaching is nearly indistinguishable from his Christology, and explain his call for a "religionless" Christianity as an attempt to restore the church's vital Christological center of solidarity with God and the world.⁷

Bonhoeffer's Christological proclamation was all the more striking for the time in which it was developed, during the ascent of a totalizing nationalist ideology within German society and the church. And yet Bonhoeffer rarely preached morality, social action, or politics. In fact, he warned his Finkenwalde students that such sermons might obscure the very Word whose

⁴ The full extent of Bonhoeffer's thoughts on "religionless Christianity" and "nonreligious interpretation" are beyond the scope of this paper, and must be pieced together from fragments of his prison letters during the final year of his life. The book he was writing from Tegel prison before his execution had a working title of "Nonreligious Interpretation in a World Come of Age," but he admits to his friend and biographer Bethge that his thinking on these topics "is all very much in the early stages," and his thoughts remained undeveloped in many areas (870). Further, Bonhoeffer acknowledged that his concern was Christological, not ecclesiological, and that one could approach his central Christological concern from many different angles besides his "religionless" one. Broadly speaking, Bonhoeffer's work centers on the reality of Christ as a "man for others" in solidarity with the world. "Religion" obscures that reality wherever it ceases to be united with Christ in his "for-others"-ness with the powerless, and instead operates as a privileged Western institution marked by inwardness, metaphysics, partiality, and individualism. For a helpful survey of Bonhoeffer's late thought, see Bethge, 853-886.

⁵ Bonhoeffer only preached regularly on Sundays during two short periods of his life—both in German-speaking congregations abroad—but continued to preach occasionally in chaplaincy, congregational, and classroom settings throughout his career. Barnett, 9.

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Proclaimed Word," in *Worldly Preaching, with Bonhoeffer's Finkenwalde Lectures on Homiletics*, ed. Clyde E. Fant (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1975), 126.

⁷ Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 170.

presence they ought to reveal.⁸ Bonhoeffer's Christology insists upon a Christ who is truly present in the sermon, the Word who is ever disrupting, judging, and reconciling its listeners even from within the limitations of human speech and understanding.⁹ That Christ can so fully inhabit human proclamation is explained through Bonhoeffer's distinctive take on Chalcedonian definition of classical Christology.

This paper will explore the Christology that gave rise to Bonhoeffer's preaching lectures. What was Bonhoeffer's Christology? How did it influence his homiletics? And how does this Christologic preaching convict and challenge the preacher today? Because Christology is at the heart of Bonhoeffer's homiletics, this paper will begin there, examining his Christology as presented in his 1933 lectures on the subject. The paper will then explore his 1935-37 preaching lectures at Finkenwalde and several representative sermons, demonstrating how vitally interconnected were his Christology and preaching. Finally, the paper will conclude with personal reflection.

Bonhoeffer's Christology: Background

Christology is at the very "heart of Bonhoeffer's theology."¹⁰ While his Christology may be pieced together in its more mature form through his later works—particularly his prison letters and *Ethics*—it is presented in its most complete and systematic form in the Christology

⁸ This is a consistent theme in his preaching lectures at Finkenwalde; for example: "Do not overemphasize the contemporary significance of the scripture. Its present significance is presupposed. . . . Avoid saying, 'This speaks exactly to you and me.'" Bonhoeffer, "Postscript" in *Worldly Preaching*, 179.

⁹ In this way, Bonhoeffer's homiletics bear a striking resemblance to Rowan Williams' work on communicating God from beyond the edge of human language. This resemblance is perhaps unsurprising, given Williams' recent interest in Bonhoeffer's Christology and its resonance with his corpus of theological writings. For example, in Williams' Gifford lectures, he posits that God may best be communicated when language is stretched to its breaking point, in the "excessive speech" that emerges beyond linguistic necessity in raw emotion, evocative metaphor, and silence. Williams, "Representing Reality" (The Gifford Lectures, University of Edinburgh, 7 November 2013), <https://www.giffordlectures.org/lectures/making-representations-religious-faith-and-habits-language>.

¹⁰ Edwin H. Robinson, translator's preface to *Christ the Center* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 8.

lectures he delivered in the summer of 1933 at the University of Berlin. 1933 was a watershed year. Hitler came to power in January 1933, when a barely twenty-seven year old Bonhoeffer was engaged in parish ministry and lecturing at the University of Berlin, participating in a church and faculty with which he was increasingly at theological odds.¹¹ The young Bonhoeffer watched with alarm as even “the most intelligent people totally lost their heads and their Bible”¹² amidst the Nazi pursuit of national rebirth and racial-ethnic purity.¹³ That summer, the nationalist German Christian faction won an overwhelming majority in the national church, and its September synod was so dominated by Nazi uniforms that it became known as the “Brown Synod.” During this time, the church adopted the “Aryan paragraph,” restricting those of Jewish descent from church membership. Bonhoeffer and his allies’ attempts to counter this measure failed, and he became a founding member of the breakaway Confessing Church in response, co-authoring its foundational documents with such contemporaries as Karl Barth.¹⁴ In the summer of 1933, Bonhoeffer’s essay “The Church and the Jewish Question” was published, placing him squarely in opposition to the church’s nationalist turn:

*In reality, it is the duty of Christian proclamation to say: here, where Jew and German together stand under God’s Word, is church: here it will be proven whether or not the church is still church. If someone feels unable to continue in church fellowship with Christians of Jewish origin, nothing can prevent him from leaving this church fellowship. But it must be made clear to him, with ultimate seriousness, that he is turning his back on the place where the church of Christ stands.*¹⁵

¹¹ Larry Rasmussen, Introduction to *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 12, Berlin: 1932-1933* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ed. Larry Rasmussen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 1-2.

¹² Quoted in Rasmussen, 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-17.

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 12, Berlin: 1932-1933*, ed. Larry Rasmussen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 370. Italics added.

Bonhoeffer's resistance to the Aryan paragraph and solidarity with the Jews is rooted in both his Christology and his theology of proclamation. Christ, the judging and reconciling Word, is present in the truthful proclamation of the church—a reality that his Christology lectures of the same year would expound upon. This excerpt demonstrates the centrality of Christology in Bonhoeffer's thought in 1933, before the major events of Bonhoeffer's personal and political life. Though early in his theological career, Bonhoeffer's Christology was already the seed from which his later thought would grow. The Christology of his 1933 lectures was not annulled by later experience, only expanded and deepened, remaining throughout his life "the basis of his thinking about Christ."¹⁶ Thus these early lectures will serve as the basis for examining Bonhoeffer's Christology in this paper, for as his translator notes, in them "we come very close to the mind of Bonhoeffer."¹⁷

Yet this text is not without its challenges. First, it is not Bonhoeffer's own; his original written lectures were never found, and were instead reconstructed from the notes of his students by friend and biographer Eberhard Bethge. While scholars agree to the trustworthiness of Bethge's reconstruction,¹⁸ it remains a mediated text. Further, the lectures are unfinished. Intended to be a three-part series, the final part on "The Eternal Christ" was either never given or no manuscript preserved, leaving Bonhoeffer's Christological arc tantalizingly incomplete. These textual challenges make for difficult reading, but present an interesting analogy to the Word itself about whom they are concerned. Through this mediated, translated, incomplete text,

¹⁶ Rasmussen, 9. See also Williams, 169: "The themes of the [Christology] lectures are foreshadowed in earlier lectures and sermons, and are developed with extraordinary creativity both in the fragments of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and in the prison letters."

¹⁷ Robinson, 9.

¹⁸ Much of Bonhoeffer's prison correspondence was with Bethge; they maintained an intimate friendship of personal and theological exchange, and Bethge was entrusted with his corpus after his death. See Robinson, 8.

Bonhoeffer's Christology emerges with freshness and clarity, not diminished by the creaturely limitations by which it is conveyed but embodying them as though from the mouth of Bonhoeffer himself. "Here [in the lectures] we can listen to Bonhoeffer,"¹⁹ his translator claims; here we encounter "the mind of Bonhoeffer" despite whatever human error might be preserved in the texts. It is this mind, this Christological thought, which communes with and impresses upon the mind of the reader. In this way, the shortcomings of the text become its adornment, and the form of the lectures uniquely mirrors their subject.

Bonhoeffer's text is divided into two parts: "The Present Christ—the Pro Me" and "The Historical Christ," corresponding generally to the respective ideas of the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history which had so dominated Protestant theology from the 17th to 19th centuries.²⁰ In Bonhoeffer's treatment, there is no competition between the present and historical Christ, nor between his divine and human natures, and the two sections are bound together in a unified Christological vision rooted in classical Chalcedon orthodoxy. The Chalcedon Definition established the non-competitive union of Christ as one person in two natures "without confusion, change, division, or separation."²¹ Rowan Williams, whose recent work has focused on a retrieval and fresh appraisal of Bonhoeffer's Christology, notes that one could read his lectures "explicitly as a kind of commentary on this [Chalcedonian] mainstream doctrinal reflection rather than as a drastic departure or a modern eccentricity."²² Within this commentary and without eccentricity, however, Bonhoeffer still carves out a distinctive Christological grammar that enables him to bring clarity to persistent Reformation debates and creatively articulate the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 43, 69-73.

²¹ Andrew Louth, "Christology in the East from the Council of Chalcedon to John Damascene" in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 139.

²² Williams, 170.

relevance of the present Christ to pressing matters of the day. His distinctive grammar includes several elements: Christology as a question of “who” rather than “how”; Christ as Counter-Logos; and Christ as *pro me*.

Christology as a Question of “Who” vs “How”

“Only because Christ is present can we question him. This presence is the necessary presupposition for the unfolding of the christological question.”²³ Thus Bonhoeffer creatively reimagines Christology’s starting point as a question, rather than a proposition, addressed to the person of Christ.²⁴ Bonhoeffer’s approach to Christology-as-question gives him a flexible starting point to move from the negative parameters established at Chalcedon (“without confusion, change, division, or separation”) toward a positive Christology that asks, “Who is this God-Man?” Beginning Christology in question rather than in statement, and asking “who” rather than “how,” enables one to puzzle out the mysteries of Christ’s incarnation within the bounds of orthodoxy but at the very limits of speech and understanding. Bonhoeffer’s new starting point thus preserves what he perceives as Chalcedon’s strength: “a factual, but also living, statement which bursts the bounds of all thought-forms.”²⁵

But it is not enough to begin Christology with a question; that question must have its proper form and object. To Bonhoeffer, that object can only be the person of Jesus, the one of whom the church has declared, “He is God.” The theandric union revealed in Jesus Christ through the witness of scripture and the church is the starting premise for Christology. Because Christ is a unified person, not an interplay of natures, this question can only be properly framed

²³ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 43.

²⁴ Williams, 183.

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 88.

as “who,” never “how.” Christ, the God-Man, is the object of Christological inquiry, and the only question that can properly be asked of him is, “Who are you?”²⁶ Rowan Williams explains:

For Bonhoeffer, what matters most is the repudiation of what he calls the ‘how?’ question. Confronted with Christ, we can only ever ask ‘who?’ Any theology that seeks to show how the Incarnation is *in principle* or *in theory* possible . . . is an attempt to stand at an angle to the actual encounter and to speak of Christ as if he were a possibility rather than always and inescapably an actuality.²⁷

The inescapable actuality of Christ’s presence can only begin to be addressed in the question, “Who are you?” This question anticipates a response, and therefore the one who asks listens attentively for the address of Christ. Listening, silence, and humble anticipation are thus the posture of the church that would begin to study Christ. Bonhoeffer writes, “In the humble silence of the worshiping congregation we concern ourselves with Christology.”²⁸

Christ as Counter-Logos

If the starting point for Christology is a question, then Christ must be its answer. This answer is the Logos, the Word, God’s communication of Godself to the human logos that asks “Who are you?” In reimagining Christology’s starting point as this “who” question, Bonhoeffer defines how this logos can be conceived. The logos is not timeless truth or transcendent idea; it is not a God-concept suspended outside of time, simply waiting to be perceived, classified, and apprehended by the human logos. If it were so, this Logos would be stripped of its personhood, reduced to an idea about which the human logos may inquire, “how?”²⁹ And if the Logos may be classified by the scientific inquiry of the human logos, it remains vulnerable to counter-logos, to the progressive understanding of the human logos as new iterations of thought interrogate (that

²⁶ Ibid., 102.

²⁷ Williams, 183. Italics added.

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 27.

²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 49-51.

is, counter-logos) this transcendent idea. The divine Logos is approached by human logos (understanding of God), counter-logos (challenge to this understanding), and new human logos (new synthesized understanding) in a progressive understanding.³⁰

Such an approach, rooted in “how” questions, was reminiscent of the modern Protestant liberalism that had emerged in 19th century Germany, and against which Bonhoeffer’s Christology served as bulwark and corrective.³¹ This liberalism found its roots in the European Enlightenment—by which “man began to become conscious of his power for science, and of his power through science”³²—and was especially propelled into theological discourse through German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, known as “Father of Modern Liberal Theology.” Under Schleiermacher’s significant influence, 19th century theology reconceptualized God as a divine *concept* to be discovered from human consciousness (that is, human logos), rather than a divine *being* to be encountered only through God’s self-revelation (that is, divine Logos).³³

Against such theology, Bonhoeffer helpfully describes the divine Logos as “living address.”³⁴ Here, the term “living” indicates embodied personhood, freedom, and dynamic connection to the human logos in unique, time-bound connection. “Address” implies the Logos as communication and the necessity of an addressee, a community in which the Word discloses itself to another. The “who” of the Logos is Christ the Living Address, Christ the Word

³⁰ Ibid., 29-30.

³¹ Ibid., 28-29, 100-101. Though Bonhoeffer only occasionally mentions the dangers of such thought explicitly in his lectures, his entire Christology project may reasonably be read in light of such theology as the dominant thought in German academia. Williams describes Bonhoeffer’s Christology as a retrieval of the classical orthodoxy of Chalcedon and the Reformers. Williams, 170.

³² Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 25.

³³ My articulation of modern liberalism here is a paraphrase from an earlier paper of mine. Amy Rowe, “Theology in Purgatory: Karl Barth’s Feuerbachian Critique of Modern Liberalism and a Modern Application” (class paper, Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, PA, 14 December 2020).

³⁴ Ibid., 50.

addressing another. In other words, Christ himself is the Counter-Logos, a new being rather than a new idea which confronts the human logos decisively.³⁵ Bonhoeffer writes:

The question, ‘Who are you?’ is the question of dethroned and distraught reason; but it is also the question of faith: ‘Who are you? Are you God himself?’ This is the question with which Christology is concerned. Christ is the Counter-Logos. Classification is no longer a possibility, because the existence of this Logos spells the end of human logos. . . . He only answers to the question, ‘Who?’³⁶

By changing the Christological starting point, Bonhoeffer is able to retain the essential personhood of the Logos while bringing it into contact with the human logos. But this contact “places a man in truth before God,”³⁷ creating a crisis for the human logos. Confronted by the addressing Logos, the limits of one’s own logos become clear. The human logos cannot ask “Who are you?” from within its limited consciousness or risk reducing the divine Logos to merely a projection of the human logos. Instead, the divine Logos must answer the question of its personhood before the human logos can ever posit the question. Thus the human logos discovers that the Logos it questions is already questioning it, an interrogation under which the human logos must either submit or rebel.³⁸ Rowan Williams describes this encounter:

Faced with the radical challenge to its own logos, humanity seeks the death of the divine Logos. The reality that is Jesus cannot be made to reflect us back to ourselves in our own terms, so that if we do not accept the mortality and death of our human logos, we are going to be complicit in the death of the Word of God. . . . For Bonhoeffer, human logos recognizes its true destiny only when confronted with what demands its death . . .³⁹

Christ pro-me

³⁵ Ibid., 30.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 50.

³⁸ Ibid., 59-61.

³⁹ Williams, 185-186.

At this crisis of confrontation between divine Logos and human logos, the Christological reality becomes clear. Confronted by the living address who is Christ the Word, “man in his being and existence is placed in the truth”⁴⁰ and his predicament as limited human logos is revealed. He must ask, “Who are you?” but he requires union with Christ before this question may possibly arise from his corrupted human logos, now under the judgment of the Logos. Here is the liberating word of the gospel: Christ the divine Logos has entered the human logos in the humiliation of Jesus Christ.⁴¹ This humiliation is not the fact of the incarnation—the incarnation is simply the “who” of Jesus Christ the God-Man—but of Christ’s free assumption of the likeness of sinful flesh.⁴² By this humiliation, Christ has willed to be both question and answer, divine address and addressee, law and grace, command and forgiveness, enabling the human logos to know itself at once judged and received by the divine Logos. The non-competitive union means that God in Christ is at once exalted and humiliated, fully human and fully divine without either nature competing for space. This union allows for what Williams calls “the double solidarity of Christ with God and with us, a solidarity which does not require any aspect of either term to be brushed out of the picture.”⁴³ The Logos who questions the human logos has already graciously provided his own response by his humiliation, enabling the human logos to ask the essential question of faith: “Who are you?”

Here, at the encounter between Logos and logos, does the true “who” of the God-Man and the true starting point of Christology become clear. God in Christ is radically and wholly *pro*

⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 51.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 52. Bonhoeffer is careful throughout his Christology to make the distinction that Christ’s humiliation is not in his incarnation, but in his assumption of the sinfulness of human nature terminating in the cross. “God is revealed in the flesh [that is, the incarnation] but concealed in the stumbling block [that is, his humiliation or offence],” 54

⁴³ Williams 173.

me, that is, for me. To Bonhoeffer, this is not an accident, effect, or emanating consequence of the incarnation, but is the vital ontological reality of Christ's being. "Christ is *only* Christ for me . . . Specific Christological work can begin freely once this presupposition is accepted."⁴⁴ Christ the Word is only truly present in his being-for-me. And in the presence of Christ's being-for-me, I become truly me, newly created as being-for-Christ. Bonhoeffer writes:

He stands *pro me*. He stands in my place, where I should stand, but cannot. He stands on the boundary of my existence, beyond my existence, yet for me. That brings out clearly that I am separated from my "I" which I should be [the "I" which is able to address the Logos as "who"], by a boundary which I am unable to cross. The boundary lies between me and me, the old and new "I." It is in this encounter with this boundary that I shall be judged. At this place, I cannot stand alone. At this place stands Christ, between me and me, the old and the new existence. Thus Christ is at one and the same time my boundary and my rediscovered centre. He is the center between "I" and "I," and between "I" and God. The boundary can only be known as boundary from beyond the boundary. In Christ man recognizes it and thereby at the same time finds his new centre again. It is the nature of the person of Christ to be in the centre. . . . When we turn the question, "Where?" back into the question, "Who?," we get the answer. Christ is the mediator as the one who exists *pro me*. That is his nature and mode of existence.⁴⁵

Christ's essential identity lies in his being radically *pro me*, the one who exists for my sake.

In this way, Bonhoeffer's Christ *pro me* creatively reframes the non-competitive union as the vehicle for Christ's solidarity with the world. Just as the divine and human natures are not rivals within Christ, so Christ's being is not rival to my being; rather, in his humiliation Christ has forgone any such rivalry in favor of union with humanity.⁴⁶ Jesus Christ is truly, wholly, radically *pro me*; he freely embodies vulnerable other-directedness. Williams helpfully summarizes Bonhoeffer's claim:

If God is wholly for us in Christ, God is never seeking to displace our createdness in order to win for Godself a space in the world; thus faith can never be a matter of securing

⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 47. Italics added.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 60. Although Bonhoeffer begins this section with a question of "where," he earlier clarifies that such a question may be asked because it has already been situated within the person of "who."

⁴⁶ Williams, 90-91.

a territory within the world, over against some alternative space of human action and aspiration. The challenge of the incarnate Christ is to see God's work as directed toward the wholesale pervading of created reality by the divine without any loss of its integrity.⁴⁷

Bonhoeffer has reframed the starting point and grammar of Chalcedon Christology in such a way as to address the major Christological debates of the ages, as well as radically reimagining Christ's present solidarity with the world as the basis of Christian life and practice.

Christological Implications for Preaching

While Bonhoeffer's life and works in later years would focus on the ethical implications of such solidarity, his Christology lectures focus on its implications within the church, particularly in the ministries of proclamation and sacrament. A thorough treatment of the Eucharistic outworkings of Bonhoeffer's Christology lies beyond the scope of this paper; however, a brief summary will highlight the complementarity of word and sacrament as Christ's presence in the church. Bonhoeffer describes the incarnate Christ present in the sacrament in a manner consistent with his Christological claims, a presence that cannot be interrogated by questions of "how," but only of "who."⁴⁸ Who is the Christ present in the sacrament? Christ is the incarnate God-Man, present in his humiliation in the creaturely elements of bread, wine, and human body in the sacrament.⁴⁹ By this construction, Bonhoeffer bypasses and ultimately dismisses Reformation debates over both the *Extra Calvinisticum* and Luther's *Genus Magesticum* as "conceptual blind alley[s]" which fail Christologically by answering the "how" and not the "who" of Christ's presence in the sacrament.⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer then likens Christ's

⁴⁷ Williams, 170.

⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 54. "The question about the presence of Christ in the sacrament may not be posed or analysed as a question about the humanity and deity of Christ, but only as the question of the presence of the God-Man in the form of his humiliation."

⁴⁹ See note 47 above for elaboration on Bonhoeffer's use of "humiliation," which is not the same as his incarnation. E.g., "The humiliation is no accident of his divine-human substance, but it is his existence." Ibid, 57.

⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 56-57.

presence in the sacrament to his presence in preaching, asserting that the “one judging and forgiving Christ, who is the Word” is completely present in both.⁵¹ This Word is present in preaching in the human logos; he is present in the sacrament in the human body and created matter. In both, he is Christ *pro me*, Christ as being-for-others, the Creator present as creature and thereby making a new creation within his union.⁵²

Christ the Word is also present in and as the Word of the church in the spoken word of preaching. Bonhoeffer’s Christological grammar once again centers on the question of “who,” pressing this question to its startlingly incarnational conclusion:

Christ’s presence *is his existence* as proclamation. The whole Christ is present in preaching, humiliated and exalted. . . . The sermon is both the riches and the poverty of the Church. It is the form of the present Christ to which we are bound and to which we must hold. If the complete Christ is not in the preaching, then the Church is broken.⁵³

Christ exists in the humiliation of the sermon as Word, Logos, living address, *pro me*. As he exists for others in the creaturely elements of the sacrament—bread, wine, the human digestive system—so he exists for others in the creaturely elements of the sermon: the human logos, the limits of language, breath, saliva, air, and ear canals. In the sermon, Christ’s identity as living address is necessarily bound to his addressee in noncompetitive union between Logos and logos, Creator and creature, God and human.⁵⁴ Thus in proclamation, Bonhoeffer again portrays Christ as ontologically being-for-other:

The relation between God’s Word and man’s word in preaching is not that of mutual exclusion. The human word of preaching is not a phantom of the Word of God. Rather, God’s Word has really entered into the humiliation of the words of men. Man’s sermon is

⁵¹ Ibid, 57.

⁵² Ibid., 57-59.

⁵³ Ibid., 51-52. Italics added.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 50.

the Word of God, because God has freely bound himself and is bound to the words of men.⁵⁵

In Christ's humiliation *pro me*, the necessity and impossibility of speaking the Word of God is resolved. Christ freely exists as God's Word of judgment and forgiveness breaking upon the congregation in the proclaimed word of the sermon.

In summary, Bonhoeffer's Christology establishes a distinctive grammar by which to retain the integrity of the Chalcedonian definition while identifying its implications for life and faith with fresh clarity and creativity. Those implications for preaching are already present, albeit in skeletal form, within his 1933 Christology lectures as described above. The tumultuous year in which those lectures were given would mark the end of Bonhoeffer's relationship with the national church and the University of Berlin; in the wake of Hitler's ascent and the church's complicity, Bonhoeffer's life took a dramatic turn. Yet the years that followed were not merely conditioned by the surrounding politics, but by Bonhoeffer's growing Christological convictions. If Christ is as fully and radically *pro me* as the Christology lectures describe, then a life of union with him must be one of radical solidarity with God and the world. The outgrowth of this Christological solidarity began to take shape in the years that followed, particularly in the preaching seminary at Finkenwalde.

Finkenwalde Preaching Lectures: Background

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Bonhoeffer became a founding member of the resistance Confessing Church after the national church became dominated by the pro-Nazi German Christian faction in its elections and synod of 1933. From 1933-35, Bonhoeffer pastored two small German-speaking congregations in London, aligned with the Confessing Church, which was still at the time a faction within the national church engaged in the "church struggle"

⁵⁵ Ibid., 52.

for theological and ethical integrity. From 1935-37, national church policies began to make many activities and confessions of the Confessing Church illegal, driving it underground. The seminary at Finkenwalde was established during this time at a country home in the region of Pomerania, providing both a practical innovation for training pastors outside the state-controlled university system, and an opportunity for Bonhoeffer to shape an intimate Christian community centered on discipleship, a persistent theme of his work to date.⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer's biographer notes that soon after the seminary's establishment, the entire church "was buzzing with rumors about the terrible heresies at Finkenwalde—Catholic practices, enthusiastic pacifist activities, and radical fanaticism."⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer later wrote about the theological foundations and communal rhythms of Finkenwalde in *Life Together*. This work too resonates with the Christological insights of his 1933 lectures. For example, he writes, "Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate."⁵⁸ One hears the echoes of Christ as Counter-Logos, confronting any ideals of himself conceived by the human logos with the reality of himself as incarnate Word. The human logos may not idealize this Word, but participate in it through embodied community. This Word, this Christ *pro me*, is at the center of communal relationships: "Christ stands between the lover and the others he loves. . . . What love is, only Christ tells in his Word. Contrary to all my own opinions and convictions, Jesus Christ will tell me what love toward the brethren really is. Therefore, spiritual love is bound solely to the Word of Jesus Christ."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Bethge, 419-20.

⁵⁷ Bethge, 433. "Catholic practices" included rhythms of regular communal prayer, Eucharist, and mutual confession. "Pacifist activities" were discussions on nonviolence and disarmament that attracted a variety of thinkers; at the time, Lutheran theology supported compulsory military service, and most young seminarians expected to be called upon to fight at some point, making pacifism a controversial topic.

⁵⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954), 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

In this way, Bonhoeffer sought to embody his Christology in the communal life at Finkenwalde. He and his students would not simply study the Word, but live with the Word as its center. This living Christology continued in their study and practice of preaching, which began in silent anticipation of the Word: “The speech, the Word which establishes and binds together the fellowship, is accompanied by silence.”⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer did not want his students to learn preaching through the vain attempts of the human logos, but by living in the Christological reality, allowing themselves to be encountered by Christ’s Word and embodying his radical other-directedness in their life together.

Within this communal setting, the content of Bonhoeffer’s preaching lectures is thoroughly, at times arrestingly, centered on the reality of Christ. Christology and preaching were both so central to Bonhoeffer’s thought that they are at times “virtually inseparable,”⁶¹ and this inseparability is clear when one places the preaching and Christology lectures side by side. The Finkenwalde lectures read as a continuation and maturation of Bonhoeffer’s Christology. Because that Christology has been thoroughly explored above, this section of the paper will avoid rereading Christological ground but instead focus on how the practice of preaching is informed and permeated by Bonhoeffer’s distinctive Christology.

Finkenwalde Preaching Lectures: Content

Preaching that Asks “Who?”

Christological preaching holds together the Chalcedonian union of Christ, approaching its subject as a person in noncompetitive union with humanity. Bonhoeffer writes, “The proclaimed word is the incarnate Christ himself. . . . The preached Christ is both the Historical One and the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 78. Cf. the opening lines of Bonhoeffer’s first Christology lecture, some of which are quoted earlier in this paper: “Teaching about Christ begins in silence. . . . In the humble silence of the worshipping congregation we concern ourselves with Christology.” *Christ the Center*, 27.

⁶¹ Fant, Preface to *Worldly Preaching*, ix.

Present One.”⁶² The preacher, as the theologian, must be careful to approach this Christ as a “who” rather than a “how.” To do so, the preacher must adopt a posture toward his craft of curious questioning rather than scientific classification. This posture is reflected in the preaching lectures’ discussion of the preacher as witness to scripture.

Bonhoeffer clarifies that the preacher is a witness to the testimony of the apostles in scripture, who themselves bear witness to the testimony of Christ. Such an understanding of this living, interconnected witness keeps the preacher in perpetual contact with the “who” of scripture: Jesus Christ, to whom all scripture bears witness. This witness does not emerge from the preacher’s own doctrinal perception, but by the commission of Christ in scripture. “Only where Christ is preached is God present. Without him the sermon is at best nothing more than empty doctrine. If Christ is preached, then the sermon is a witness.”⁶³ When the preacher is commissioned to bear witness, he is sent by Christ to proclaim Christ, and his craft is thus oriented from beginning to end around the central, undivided person of Christ. In other words, the act of proclamation persistently asks “Who is the Christ revealed in scripture?” and invites the congregation into the act of this Christ-directed curiosity. This act of witnessing also compels the preacher to “stand behind his testimony,” such that his life and accomplishments are neither prop nor distraction from the testimony of Jesus Christ. “As he preaches, the witness himself is continually involved in the decision for or against the preached Christ.”⁶⁴ In the crafting of the sermon, the preacher is thus always interrogating the Christ who interrogates him from within the revelation of scripture.

⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 126.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

Further, the question of “Who” locates the preacher’s task within the revelation of scripture. Bonhoeffer describes the preacher “accompany[ing]” the text into the congregation, not subjecting it to his personal ambitions or doctrinal inquiries, but permitting “the Word’s almost magnetic relationship to its congregation.”⁶⁵ This magnetism is retained in the witness maintaining distance between himself and that to which he testifies, so that he does not become the one witnessed to. In this distance, the preacher is constantly reminded that the address of the text is God’s, not his own: “In texts of wrath, for example, I am not the one who is angry. God is. God converts, not I. It is as if I read a letter which another has written.”⁶⁶ By maintaining a fixed focus on the Christ revealed in the word, the preacher avoids excess fatigue (to Bonhoeffer, a sure sign that Word has been obscured by self-exertion) and excess emotionalism in his preaching.

Finally, Bonhoeffer draws an interesting distinction between interpreting and explaining the text of scripture. Interpreting is the act of serving the text in proclamation, bringing it as helper into the life of the congregation, rather than wrestling it into submission within the preacher’s own understanding. To do so begins in the pastor’s study, where he waits in patient meditation for God’s self-revelation in the text. This meditation is aided by exegetical tools and works of doctrine, but those aids must not enter the word of proclamation, only provide it solid grounding from which truthful proclamation may confidently be offered. If the preacher’s entire approach to scripture is one of study, analysis, and knowledge acquisition, he risks reducing its subject to a series of “how” questions, to intellectual intrigue but not living revelation. The

⁶⁵ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 140. Cf. Bonhoeffer’s instructions in the postscript to the lectures: “Do not use the scripture as a club with which to beat the congregation. . . . Do not indulge in the cataloguing of the sins and problems within the congregation. . . . Do not terrify men with the Last Judgment and death. Christ does not overpower, he knocks at the door. Therefore it is not appropriate for us to be so violent in the sermon.” Ibid., 180.

“who” of Jesus Christ is revealed instead to the preacher who patiently awaits its revelation in prayer, meditation, and silent anticipation.⁶⁷

Every day should begin with meditation on the scriptures. Before we meet men, we should meet Christ. Before we decide something, his decision should have confronted us. This kind of scriptural study is . . . not a matter of thinking new and great thoughts, but rather of hearing the simple old thoughts and of storing their inspiration in our hearts. We only have the commission to do this work. God intends that his Word should be read and prayed over. We leave it up to him what he will make out of it.⁶⁸

Bonhoeffer’s own sermons demonstrate this posture of asking “Who?” by beginning in direct address, making an evocative claim about God at the very start of the sermon which stirs curiosity and interest within the congregation. For example, one of his earliest sermons from 1928 begins, “Fairy tales and legends from the oldest times tell of the days when God walked among human beings.”⁶⁹ Another sermon begins, “The church does not leave anyone alone”⁷⁰; still another, “Dear congregation, that is certainly an extremely off-putting way to start a conversation with a person: Since you have been raised with Christ, do this and that.”⁷¹ These introductions evoke interest in the “who” to which they testify, bringing the congregation into that “magnetic” space of mutual attraction between Word and congregation. As the sermons progress, Bonhoeffer frequently peppers them with questions about the text, the congregation; such questions are usually rhetorical, left unanswered to charge the magnetic space between Christ and congregation. This magnetism draws the listener deeper and deeper into the evocative

⁶⁷ Ibid., 141-3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁶⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 33.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁷¹ Ibid., 89.

Christological question, “Who is this?” until ending abruptly, not in tidy conclusion but in suspended thought,⁷² gesturing beyond the limits of speech to the Word himself.⁷³

Encountering the Counter-Logos

In describing the practicing of sermons between the students at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer writes that “the worst of sins in presenting the scriptures” is to direct “attention to myself instead of to the Word.”⁷⁴ The avoidance of this homiletic sin is a prominent theme throughout the preaching lectures, and flows directly from Bonhoeffer’s Christology. If Christ is truly present in the sermon, as Bonhoeffer unwaveringly asserts, then much of the preacher’s task is to avoid obscuring his presence. The preacher must get out of the way of the self-movement of the Word from the sermon to the congregation.⁷⁵ In his Christology, this “getting out of the way” takes place in the confrontation between human logos and Counter-Logos. As described earlier, this confrontation must always result in either the death of the human logos or the killing of the Counter-Logos. In choosing death, the human logos paradoxically discovers its life in union with the life of the Counter-Logos. This same confrontation plays out in the sermon, week after week, as the preacher’s human logos must again and again accept its death and find its life in Christ. To preach this Christ, then, is an invitation to die.⁷⁶

⁷² The examples of this are too numerous to list here, but as one representative, the sermon which began “Dear congregation” above ends with, “Lord, our ruler, eternal God! Send a hunger into the land. Not a hunger for bread and a thirst for water, but a hunger to hear the word of the Lord. Amen.” Ibid., 98.

⁷³ Bonhoeffer’s postscript advises: “Do not slave over the introduction and the conclusion of the sermon. You can commit yourself immediately to the Word. It is a ship ‘loaded to its capacity.’” Ibid., 180.

⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 78.

⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 128.

⁷⁶ In *The Cost of Discipleship*, written during the Finkenwalde years, Bonhoeffer famously wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 44. C.f., “There are only two ways possible of encountering Jesus: man must die or he must put Jesus to death.” Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 35.

This death which is merely conceptual in Bonhoeffer's Christology becomes challengingly practical in his homiletics. It requires the preacher's steadfast refusal to "indulge tricks and techniques, both the emotional and rhetorical ones"⁷⁷ in favor of direct, simple speech which presents Christ and evokes a longing for more.⁷⁸ The sermon is not the preacher's performance nor a work of art;⁷⁹ it is not the place for discourse,⁸⁰ extensive application,⁸¹ displays of virtuosity,⁸² religious jargon,⁸³ personal anecdotes, illustrations, or quotations.⁸⁴ Even Bonhoeffer's guidance as to the placement of the preacher's chair during worship, his stance at prayer, and other matters of liturgical choreography are given to emphasize the reality that the preacher is merely the servant, never the center, of the church's worship.⁸⁵ In countless small moments of homiletic decision, Christ bids the preacher to come and die. Bonhoeffer summarizes: "The involvement of the preacher is that of a man who puts himself to death for the sake of the Word, who dies to his own will and only wishes to be a handservant of God. He wants only what the Word itself wants."⁸⁶

⁷⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 137.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 179.

⁸³ *Ibid.* "The preacher must ask himself, 'Do I believe what I say? Or am I just making official sounds?'"

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 150-5. Bonhoeffer's prescriptions are in a Lutheran liturgical context, thus not particularly relevant in an Anglican setting whose movements and gestures are prescribed by different rubrics. Nonetheless, the care with which Bonhoeffer contemplates the preacher's physical presence throughout the worship service offers an invitation to any preacher of any tradition to reflect on how one's bodily postures might signal the presence of Christ in the congregation's midst.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

However, this preacherly death does not imply sermons that are dry, unimaginative, or disconnected from the pressing concerns of humanity. Bonhoeffer's Christology asserts that in the humiliation of the proclaimed word, Christ the Word exists without rivalry or competition with the human word of the sermon.⁸⁷ There, he "embraces the whole of humanity with its genuinely sinful nature" and "his flesh is our flesh and our flesh is his flesh."⁸⁸ Thus the sermon is a place of profoundly personal solidarity between Christ and preacher, and Christ and congregation. The preacher's death does not imply the erasure of his personhood, as if he and Christ were competing for space, but the union of his personhood with Christ the Word. Because this Word is a living being of enormous generative power, the sermon too is warm, humane, and creative. The death of the preacher, then, does not kill what is creaturely in the sermon, but submits it to the service of the New Creature, Christ. Those creaturely elements which obscure Christ and draw attention to the preacher must die, but their death holds the promise of sermons that pulsate with Christ's life.

Bonhoeffer's sermons demonstrate such lively creative energy. For example, his sermon on 1 Cor 13:1-3, given in October 1934, speaks directly to the concerns of its hearers: "Whether or not we want to see it, whether or not we think it is right, the churches are caught up in a struggle for faith such as we have not seen for hundreds of years."⁸⁹ But his acknowledgement of the present situation does not become an opportunity for Bonhoeffer to discuss the German struggle or call people to action. Rather, it merely situates the congregation within their historical moment in order to immediately turn their attention to the Christ who is already present there as a Word of judgment and mercy.

⁸⁷ See, e.g., footnote 57 above from Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 51.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 127-8.

⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 214.

This is a struggle—whether or not we agree—over our confession of Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Redeemer of the world. But anyone who inwardly and outwardly joins in this struggle for this confession knows that such a struggle for faith carries a great temptation with it—the temptation of being too sure of oneself, of self-righteousness and dogmatism, which also means the temptation to be unloving toward one’s opponent. And yet this opponent can never be overcome if not through love, since no opponent is ever overcome, except by love. Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing—how many people have been overcome by these words of Jesus! Even of the most passionate battle for the faith it could well be said: “. . . but had not love, it would be nothing.”⁹⁰

In simple language, infused with scripture, Bonhoeffer’s sermon proclaims Christ—not as conceived by Bonhoeffer’s human logos, but as the Counter-Logos emerging from scripture to confront humanity in every historical moment.

Christ *pro me* in the Sermon

The Counter-Logos has not scorned the humiliation of the human logos in proclamation, but instead confronts, judges, forgives, and exalts it in union with itself. At the point of the death of the human logos, paradoxically, preacher and congregation discover their life in the Logos. This is the central reality of Christ’s identity: his existence as wholly and radically *pro me*. Christ does not only judge, but forgive; not only humble, but exalt; not only die, but live. In the proclamation of the word, Christ’s humiliation and death is my exaltation and life. The Creator’s humiliation to creature means creation’s exaltation to new creation. This Christological reality means that the act of preaching is wondrously generative, speaking into being the life and healing of the world. Bonhoeffer describes this paradox in such beautiful language that it is worth reproducing here in its entirety:

In the proclaimed word Christ is alive as the Word of the Father. In the proclaimed word he receives the congregation until himself. Through the Word the world was created. The Word became incarnate. The incarnate Word continues to exist for us in the scripture. Through the Holy Spirit, the incarnate Word comes to us from the Scripture in the sermon. And it is one and the same Word: the Word of creation, the Word of the

⁹⁰ Ibid., 215.

incarnation, the Word of the holy scripture, the Word of the sermon. It is the creating, accepting, and reconciling Word of God, for whose sake the world exists. For the sake of the proclaimed word the world exists with all its words. In the sermon the foundation for a new world is laid. . . . This is the way we must learn to look at the sermon again.⁹¹

One cannot help be stirred by this vision of a world made new through the proclamation of the creating and sustaining Word.

But practically speaking, how does one preach in this manner? The clue is in the final line of the excerpt above. The preacher must “learn to look at the sermon” differently, Christologically, through the eyes of faith. Bonhoeffer writes that “the preacher should be assured that Christ enters the congregation through those words which he proclaims from the scripture The sermon should not leave the preacher despairing and perplexed, but joyful and certain.”⁹² Joy is the mark of Christological preaching, an expression of faith in the certainty of Christ’s renewal of all things in himself. Bonhoeffer’s 1933 Ascension Day sermon exclaims, “Joy in the sermon! That is the joy of the believing church in its unseen, heavenly Lord.”⁹³ This exclamation of joy, repeated throughout his sermon, is all the more remarkable for the bleakness of its setting, when foundations of church and society seemed to be crumbling under the Nazi regime. In the sermon, the church encounters the Christ who exists for others, offering forgiveness at the point of judgement and raising to life from the point of death. In the sermon, Christ is present in radical solidarity with us, and thus Bonhoeffer can jubilantly repeat his cry, “Joy in the sermon!” Bonhoeffer’s sermons consistently evoke joy through playful language and evocative paradox, often in the same moment at which they most poignantly describe the longing

⁹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 129-30.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 136.

and sorrow of humanity. His sermons place the paradox of Christ *pro me* at the center of their proclamation.

Concluding Reflection

This project began as a question: am I preaching Christ? Over the past five years, as I planted a church, preached monthly, prepared for ordination, and completed my studies at Trinity, this question never abated or quieted. Instead, it grew louder, more incessant, developing into a frightening conviction that the answer might actually be “no.” Bonhoeffer has been its unwitting ally. In one of my first seminary courses,⁹⁴ I encountered a quote from Bonhoeffer’s preaching lectures (quoted earlier in this paper) that has arrested me ever since: “The proclaimed word is the incarnate Christ himself. . . . walking through the congregation as the Word.”⁹⁵

Bonhoeffer’s view of preaching was a far cry from the propositional, therapeutic, pragmatic sermons that I had listened to throughout my Christian life, but whose merit I was increasingly questioning. Instead, Bonhoeffer’s preaching took as its starting point the mystery of the incarnation, God’s indwelling the material world in the person of Christ, thus redeeming matter and enabling its participation in divine realities. Somehow the inadequate words of my sermons could mystically participate in the divine Word “walking through the congregation.” *This* was preaching Christ, and I wanted to learn how to do it.

At the same time, however, I was frightened and convicted. I sensed that to preach in the way Bonhoeffer described was to consent to the words of John the Baptist: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”⁹⁶ I had become accustomed to the praise that attended my intellect and charisma in the pulpit. Was I preaching Christ? Or, as I suspected, had I been preaching myself,

⁹⁴ The course, still among my favorites at Trinity, was ST675 Engaging Beauty with Dr. Shirley Kilpatrick.

⁹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 126.

⁹⁶ John 3:30.

my ministry career, my ego, my need for control? Had my exposition obscured the present Christ from my congregation? The question became a confession, an invitation to death. Without realizing it, this point of crisis was drawing me into the heart of Bonhoeffer's Christology: an encounter with Christ *pro me*, in which I paradoxically discover my death and life in his.

Christological preaching of this sort has been a theme throughout my coursework, animating my paper topics and my preaching as I have worked through classes in church history and systematic theology. When studying the church fathers, I asked how could patristic hermeneutics might invigorate my sermons with fresh Christological vision. When studying systematics, I wondered how the church's classic Christological doctrines, beyond the limits of human comprehension or speech, might nonetheless find their expression in the sermon through Christ the Word.

The church in America is now strained and fractured under the weighty challenges of the past few years: a pandemic, ascendant nationalism, racial conflict, sexual and gender upheaval, abuse scandals, and intense politicization. Such challenges pale in comparison to those of Bonhoeffer's day; yet even in the far more intense climate of 1930s Germany, Bonhoeffer resisted the temptation to preach anything other than Christ the Word. He did not moralize or condemn, and he did not rely on his considerable rhetorical skill. Instead, he remained steadfast in his conviction that Christ was truly present in proclamation, and that there he was renewing the world. Bonhoeffer's conviction challenges me today in the fragmentation of my own world. His Christology frees me from the pressure to speak above the din of social media and twenty-four hour news, to simply trust the present Christ who is already speaking. May the Christ *pro me* remain my center, guard me against abusing the pulpit for selfish gain, and draw me ever more deeply into his solidarity with God and the world.

Bibliography

- Barth, Karl. *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Brian Cozens and John Bowden. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Bethge, Eberhard. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*. Edited by Vicki Barnett. Translated by Eric Mosbacher, Peter and Betty Ross, Frank Clarke, and William Glen-Doepel. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Christ the Center*. Translated by Edwin H. Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Edited by Isabel West. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012. Scribd ebook edition.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Touchstone, 1995.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 12, Berlin: 1932-1933*. Ed. Larry Rasmussen. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Worldly Preaching, with Bonhoeffer's Finkenwalde Lectures on Homiletics*. Edited by Clyde E. Fant. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1975.
- Louth, Andrew. "Christology in the East from the Council of Chalcedon to John Damascene." *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*. Edited by Francesca Aran Murphy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 139-152.
- Rowe, Amy. "Theology in Purgatory: Karl Barth's Feuerbachian Critique of Modern Liberalism and a Modern Application." Class paper, Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, PA, 14 December 2020.
- Williams, Rowan. "Representing Reality." The Gifford Lectures, University of Edinburgh, 7 November 2013.
- Williams, Rowan. *Christ the Heart of Creation*. London: Bloomsbury, 2018.