

Religionless Christianity and Costly Discipleship:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Times of Crisis

David Tierschel

Religion 399

Professor Darrell Jodock

May 1, 2007

I recently went to the Barnes and Noble website and typed in the word “Bonhoeffer” in to the search engine and, surprisingly, I received 211 hits. I was curious to see how popular Bonhoeffer was, so I went to another search engine, Amazon.com, and typed in the word again; I received over 6,000 hits. While Bonhoeffer is not among the “best sellers” list on either of the websites, it was curious to note a book that was at Amazon.com: number 35 was The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins.¹ It is clear that the questioning of God is abundant, or else the book would not be so popular. The popularity of the book can be attributed to a time of cultural stress that causes enough people to question the existence of God and the relevance of organized religion.

My thesis is that Dietrich Bonhoeffer has remained popular because his writings criticize the institutional church and offer a new approach to Christianity than what most people hear preached from the pulpit: “religionless” Christianity and costly discipleship. Bonhoeffer critiqued the institutional church, was a visionary, and as a result is rediscovered in times of cultural stress. Times of cultural stress are defined as times when the cultural stress reduction techniques like the church or the idea of God no longer offer hope or power to spiritually curious people.

Bonhoeffer’s writings are attractive to me in particular because I am very uncertain about my religious stance, and I am attracted to forceful, intelligent people who have radical things to say about religion, Christianity, and God. Bonhoeffer was arguing for a new understanding of the way the church needed to relate to its followers. It is important to note that when he made this claim he was under stress himself by being in

¹ Amazon.com, “Bestseller Books,” http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/51546011/ref=pd_ts_pg_2/104-6056649-2889566?ie=UTF8&pg=2, (Accessed April 26, 2007). The book list is updated hourly so the ranking of the books varies.

prison and also was in the midst of cultural stress represented by the Second World War and the Holocaust. When Bonhoeffer was popular in a previous era, the 1960's, there was a large amount of criticism surrounding God such as believing that God had died.

What Bonhoeffer offered his reader in *Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* was a voice to claim that the Church needed to be more active in helping the world, which Bonhoeffer saw as a true way to be a disciple of Christ. In order to prove that *Letters and Papers from Prison* and *Discipleship* offer a new way of being a Christian I discuss Bonhoeffer's career and demonstrate how *Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* have been interpreted and how they relate to one another, how these works have been received in scholarly circles, and why people continue to find the idea of "religionless" Christianity and costly discipleship compelling in the form of two church movements that show similar interests to Bonhoeffer. The project consists of three sections: The first examines two primary documents written by Bonhoeffer; the second focuses on how scholars have interpreted the idea of "religionlessness," *Discipleship* and the life of Bonhoeffer; the third section examines current movements commonly referred to as The Emerging Churches that have adopted or adapted the ideas that Bonhoeffer spoke of in *Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Section I

A brief biography of Bonhoeffer²

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 to a wealthy upper class family in Breslau, Germany. From an early age he showed that he had great intellectual promise, as he

² Victoria Barnett, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, <http://www.ushmm.org/bonhoeffer/b1.htm>. All the biographical information in this section was gathered from the *United States Holocaust Memorial* website.

published his doctoral dissertation by the age of 21, and started a career as a theological instructor at 25, in 1931. Not long after Hitler came to power in 1933, Bonhoeffer took a position in opposition to those in the church who supported the Nazi claim of Aryan supremacy. Between the years of 1935 and 1936 Bonhoeffer wrote *Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer saw any allegiance by the church to anyone other than Christ as wrong, and he helped to create an official church group that opposed Hitler: the Confessing Church. In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer accused the German Lutheran Church of allying with Hitler and he thought that allegiance to Hitler was a violation of his understanding of Christianity.

By 1937 the Nazis had worked to control religious opposition to their movement and declared any instruction of students by Confessing Church members as illegal. It was around this time that Bonhoeffer began to write *Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer was teaching illegally at a seminary in Finkenwalde at that time. Bonhoeffer chose to leave Germany and study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1939. After staying for a short time, Bonhoeffer returned because he viewed his role in rebuilding Germany in the aftermath of Hitler's regime as important. He placed himself strategically in the Nazi military intelligence service (*Abwehr*), a job that allowed him to actively, but secretly, oppose Hitler. He used his position to secretly inform Allied forces of a plot brewing to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer was part of the plot and was executed because of his participation in the attempted assassination.

Bonhoeffer was initially arrested not for his role in the attempt to assassinate Hitler, but because he was an accomplice to helping a number of Jews escape the Nazi grasp in 1942. Bonhoeffer wanted to help those who were marginalized and oppressed in

society at the time; Jews were at the top of a list of people who were being terrorized. Bonhoeffer was arrested in April 1943, over a year before the famous attempt to assassinate Hitler with a suitcase explosive in July of 1944. There was another attempt that failed to kill Hitler when a bomb placed on a plane Hitler was riding in failed to ignite. After the investigation following the botched assassination of Hitler, the Nazis realized that Bonhoeffer had been using his position in the *Abwehr* to pass documents back and forth between the German resistance group and the Allied forces. Bonhoeffer was executed by hanging on April 9th, 1945 in Flossenburg concentration camp. During the time he was incarcerated he wrote the letters collected in *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Analysis of primary source #1: *Discipleship*

Discipleship was written by Bonhoeffer and considered to be his longest and greatest work.³ It was known primarily because of the way in which Bonhoeffer called for Christians to take seriously the call of Jesus.⁴ Bonhoeffer started the book with the problem as he saw it: the church had been preaching the wrong “type” of grace.⁵ As a result, Christians were not taking seriously the call of Jesus. Bonhoeffer wanted Christians to speak out against injustice in the world by acting as Jesus commanded in the Sermon on the Mount.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, vol. 4, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, trans. Martin Kuske and Ilse Todt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 1. Quote attributed to editors Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey.

⁴ *ibid.*, 4

⁵ *ibid.*, 43-56. My interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s idea of cheap and costly grace.

Bonhoeffer used the terms “cheap grace” and “costly grace” to explain the problem and then the solution to the problem.⁶ Cheap grace takes Jesus message from the Sermon on the Mount merely as words on a page, while costly grace takes those words and lets them change the way one lived. Cheap grace does not try to make the world a better place in the name of Jesus and costly grace tries so hard to make the world better in the name of Jesus that one might get killed for it.⁷ The problem was that the church was preaching ‘cheap’ grace, which encouraged Christians to not care for each other or others. Bonhoeffer’s solution to the problem was to preach ‘costly’ grace which encouraged Christians to take risks for others.

In *Discipleship*, there was an extended reflection on the Sermon on the Mount.⁸ In his sermon, Jesus explained how Christians should treat one another and the world, and how his followers should act in the world. Bonhoeffer’s exegesis revolved around following Jesus’ call to discipleship and taking up one’s cross. Bonhoeffer wrote something similar nine years later from Tegel prison in July/August of 1944: “The church is the church when it exists for others.”⁹ When the church understood that it was doing what it was supposed to be doing, bearing the burdens of those around it that were suffering, then it could be called the church.

Bonhoeffer wanted to slap the average reader and the religious leaders of the day out of complacency by confronting them with the words of Jesus. He cut to the heart of

⁶ *ibid.*, 44-45.

⁷ *ibid.*, 45.

⁸ Matt. 5-7 (Revised Standard Version).

⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison: New Greatly Enlarged Edition*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Simon & Schuster Press, LTD, 1997), 382.

the matter by insisting, “Because Christ exists, He must be followed.”¹⁰ Bonhoeffer’s interpretation was and still is shocking to read because it was such a simple way to interpret the Jesus’ teachings, and because it demands obedience.

If discipleship is to follow Jesus, then where might it lead? For Bonhoeffer the answer to the question was not complicated or difficult: “Listen to the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord!”¹¹ Bonhoeffer wanted Christians to look directly at scripture and not to stray from it. Discipleship led to following Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. The call itself was simple to Bonhoeffer: “...faith from an undivided heart, and love of God and neighbor with all our heart and soul.”¹² Bonhoeffer wanted the reader to listen, and to follow. This meant to read and study the words of Jesus, and to take them to heart. When the average person thought he/she was doing justice to the idea of following Christ by simply reading the words of Jesus he/she was mistaken; it was applying the Gospel to the current context that mattered. The Sermon on the Mount, according to Bonhoeffer was meant to be read, and more importantly obeyed.¹³

However, one would be misinterpreting Bonhoeffer to think that he wanted Christians to take up a harsh life of poverty and isolation. Bonhoeffer stated that one is to be responsible to the earthly commitments one has engaged in, but to be inwardly free of worry, in regards to how those commitments will turn out.¹⁴ This related also to how he

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 59.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 202.

¹² *ibid.*, 203.

¹³ *ibid.*, 81.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 79.

thought the church should relate to the world when he wrote *Letters and Papers from Prison*: “The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving.”¹⁵ Instead of worrying about its own preservation, the church should worry about preserving others. He elaborated on this point by explaining how a Christian should view poverty or wealth:

My faith, however, is not tied to poverty or wealth or some such thing. On the contrary, in faith I can be both—rich and poor. The main concern is not whether or not I have any worldly goods, but that I should possess goods as if I did not possess them, and inwardly I should be free of them.¹⁶
One should not strive to become poor or rich; one should strive instead to follow Christ.

Another statement made by Bonhoeffer in *Discipleship* may prompt one to view it as harsh, since following Christ was equated to suffering and rejection. Bonhoeffer commented when he wrote of how Jesus chose his disciples: “So Jesus has to make it clear and unmistakable to his disciples that the need to suffer now applies to them too. Just as Christ is only Christ as one who suffers and is rejected, so a disciple is a disciple only in suffering and being rejected, thereby participating in the crucifixion.”¹⁷ The bearing of this cross would be light and easy, because it enabled community with Christ, which was, according to Bonhoeffer, a great thing.¹⁸ But the journey should not end there; if one wanted to follow Jesus, it took application of the teachings of Jesus to one’s life.

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 382.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 78.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 85.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 87.

A pessimistic interpretation would have seen the bearing of the suffering of Jesus as something to be done in solitude; Bonhoeffer wanted the opposite to happen.¹⁹ The key for Bonhoeffer was that the Christian go to whatever length necessary to be visible to the world, and to engage it in a frontal assault.²⁰ This frontal assault is one in which the Christian lives out a life of suffering and bearing the cross not as a burden, but a blessing. Bonhoeffer wrote that, “The world must be contradicted within the world.”²¹ The world, according to Bonhoeffer, needed Christians to be the voice of Christ; Christians needed to take on the world to try to change it for the better, using Jesus’ call and teaching of love for God and neighbor as a serious weapon for change. If a Christian started fading into the background of the world, that is, if he or she no longer lived a life for Christ by suffering for others, then he or she was no longer practicing the teaching of Christ.

Bonhoeffer wrote *Discipleship* in 1935 and 1936, and it was published in 1937.²² Bonhoeffer was not at that time fully aware of the extent to which he would be following his own ideas. By positioning himself as a voice of opposition in the world, or, to the call of allegiance of Germans to Hitler, Bonhoeffer lived out his own ideals. It was because he applied his own ideas to his own life that he has become so popular since 1944. He has been respected because he paid the ultimate price for what he believed.

Analysis of primary source #2: *Letters and Papers from Prison*

What is bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today. The time when people

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 245.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 244.

²¹ *ibid.*, 244.

²² *ibid.*, 2.

could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience — and that means the time of religion in general. We are moving towards a completely religionless time; people as they are now simply cannot be religious any more. Even those who honestly describe themselves as "religious" do not in the least act up to it, and so they presumably mean something quite different by "religious."... "Christianity" has always been a form — perhaps the true form — of "religion." But if one day it becomes clear that [the “religious *a priori*” of mankind] does not exist at all, but was a historically conditioned and transient form of human self-expression, and if therefore man becomes radically religionless — and I think that that is already more or less the case (else how is it, for example, that this war, in contrast to all previous ones, is not calling forth any "religious" reaction?) — what does that mean for "Christianity?" It means that the foundation is taken away from the whole of what has up to now been our "Christianity"...[W]hat kind of situation emerges for us, for the church? How can Christ become the Lord of the religionless as well? Are there religionless Christians? If religion is only a garment of Christianity — and even this garment has looked very different at different times — then what is a religionless Christianity?²³

While he was incarcerated by the Nazis in 1944 Bonhoeffer began to wonder about how he was going to convey the words of Christ to a ruined country after the war. In a letter dated April 30, 1944 Bonhoeffer told Eberhard Bethge of the trouble that he had with understanding his own concept of what religion and Christianity would be in the future.²⁴ Bonhoeffer wrote something similar in *Discipleship* when he realized that the “church’s predicament is proving more and more clearly to be a question of how we are to live as Christians today.”²⁵ Bonhoeffer saw that because the churches failed to unite in resistance to the Nazi movement that something was drastically wrong with how people,

²³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 279. Letter to Eberhard Bethge, 30 April 1944.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 55.

and the church, understood Christianity.²⁶ Bonhoeffer did not understand why the church did not stand up to oppose Hitler.²⁷

It was unusual how Bonhoeffer continued to be a source of hope and encouragement for his friends while he was in prison. Bonhoeffer scoffed at the idea that he was suffering because of his incarceration by a terrifying regime,²⁸ and claimed that he had not changed much at all since being imprisoned.²⁹ Bonhoeffer demonstrated his lack of worry about what would happen to him in prison; he showed that what he wrote in *Discipleship* about being free of worry was something he took seriously.³⁰ This makes his writing of “religionlessness” all the more curious, because he noted in his own private correspondence how he had not given up hope and that he still had a relationship with God.³¹ Bonhoeffer was not upset with God, but still wanted to critique religion, specifically Christianity. This showed that Bonhoeffer was already dealing with an understanding that God and religion were two different things. Because he had such a close relationship with God it allowed him to criticize Christianity in the hope that it would improve.

²⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 279-280.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 280.

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 232.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 232.

³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 78

³¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 306.

One can think that when looking at Bonhoeffer's desire to look at Christianity through a religionless lens that he was upset with the church, and challenged the doctrine of the Lutheran church. This would be a correct assertion based on the evidence within *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Bonhoeffer was attempting to re-think the way Christianity had been presented to the world through the Church.³² If that meant changing the doctrine, then Bonhoeffer wanted to do that.³³

The main theme in *Letters and Papers from Prison* was that of Bonhoeffer's disappointment in the Church, a disappointment that forced him to further question how he should preach the message of Jesus, as a leader in the church. Bonhoeffer commented on the monumental task that he foresaw himself and Bethge would take up when he said, "It may be that on us [Bonhoeffer and Bethge] in particular, midway between East and West, there will fall a heavy responsibility."³⁴

It was because Bonhoeffer had such a passion and love for his vision of the church and Jesus' power to transform the world for the better that he began to think of a new way to communicate to the religionless as well.³⁵ In *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer made a distinction between those who were disciples of Christ, and those who were not; those who were insiders and who were outsiders. In *Letters and Papers from Prison*,

³² *ibid.*, 282. A letter written by Bonhoeffer to Eberhard Bethge.

³³ *ibid.*, 382. I make this assertion based on *Outline for a Book* written in late July or early August of 1944. Bonhoeffer mentions the church taking risks for others which I take to mean that he wanted to change the way the church itself operated; i.e., the church was not helping those who needed help at the time.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 282. Bonhoeffer writing to Bethge in regards to what a religionless Church would look like.

³⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 281. My thinking as to possible reasons he might have brought up religionlessness.

Bonhoeffer took the stance that Christ could be made accessible to all people.³⁶

Bonhoeffer no longer saw himself as “specially favoured” because of his call to be a disciple of Jesus, but wanted to view himself as belonging “wholly to the world.”³⁷

Bonhoeffer wrote: “The questions to be answered would surely be: What do a church, a community, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life mean in a religionless world?”³⁸

Bonhoeffer started to see the world not in terms of black and white, Christian and non-Christian, but in terms of varying shades of grey. He wanted a new understanding, even for himself, of how to communicate this new paradigm to the everyday person.

Bonhoeffer continued: “The ordinary [person], who spends everyday life at work and with his/[her] family, and of course with all kinds of diversions, is not affected.”³⁹

Bonhoeffer meant that he thought that the Christians around him were not changed by hearing the words of Jesus, and this upset him.

Bonhoeffer commented further in *Letters and Papers from Prison* that it had been the natural progression of humanity that had led the everyday person away from God; that man could operate individually apart from God and religion.⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer attempted to take this new understanding in the light of history and other movements that had called for the autonomy of a person and apply it to the church. It was because of the movement

³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 280.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*, 327.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 359.

towards individuality that, in Bonhoeffer's view, people had disregarded religion.⁴¹

Because Christians viewed themselves as independent of the world, separate from it, they had given themselves permission not to engage with it.

Bonhoeffer also commented on how Christians should have lived in the world, and taken the problems of the world seriously. Bonhoeffer wrote, "Man is summoned to share in God's sufferings at the hands of a godless world."⁴² Bonhoeffer saw the religious people as not caring enough for the world and those who were suffering in it to try to make it better. They no longer had any interest or deep concern with the problems that the world was facing such as war and the Holocaust. While thinking of how to speak of God in a non-religious way, Bonhoeffer thought language about God should not be an oppressive understanding, that is, it should not be something that makes people feel apart from God.⁴³ By taking risks for others and doing all one could to help someone in need then one would be closer to God. Action was more important than words to him. If one got comfortable in the pew at church then one was not being a disciple of Christ.

The idea of how a "religionless Christianity" would look was something so foreign to Bonhoeffer that he had to ask his friend Bethge to help him clarify his thinking: "Forgive me for still putting it all so terribly clumsily and badly, as I really feel I am. But perhaps you will help me again to make things clearer and simpler, even if only by my being able to talk about them with you and to hear you, so to speak, keep

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 359.

⁴² *ibid.*, 361.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 362.

asking and answering.”⁴⁴ This is an important point because it showed that Bonhoeffer was not ready to say concretely what a “religionless” understanding of Christianity was. This leaves room for interpretation of what a “religionless” Christianity would look like in the present setting.

Bonhoeffer came out most clearly that the church itself was responsible to the world by stating that, “The church is the church only when it exists for others.”⁴⁵ When the church was no longer interested in self preservation, but in preserving the well being of others, then, according to Bonhoeffer, it could call itself the church.

Religion and religionlessness to Bonhoeffer

Religion to Bonhoeffer meant the creation by humanity of a relationship with the divine.⁴⁶ Religion was not something that God created for humanity to know God. Bonhoeffer criticized the use of the term *a priori* as a way to interpret religious experience. This meant that he thought the nearly 2,000-year-old tradition of Christianity had been created by humans as a way to deal with that which was unexplainable. Bonhoeffer commented further: “But if one day it becomes clear that this *a priori* does not exist at all, but was a historically conditioned and transient form of human self-expression...what does that mean for Christianity?”⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer wrestled with the idea that religion was created by humans, which would trump the idea that God had anything to do with the creation of religion.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*,

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 382.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 280.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 280.

Therefore his concept of religionlessness was trying to rid humanity of the idea that humans had anything to do with creating a relationship with God. God was represented through the Biblical text, and not through the church at that time. Bonhoeffer wrote on 30 April 1944: “God is beyond in the midst of our life. The church stands not at the boundaries where human power gives out, but in the middle of the village.”⁴⁸ This meant that the church needed to be in a different place socially than the one it was in during Bonhoeffer’s time; or that the church was a larger part of society than it wanted to admit.⁴⁹

The main vehicle for communicating Christian doctrine was the church. By not being in the middle of the resistance to Hitler, the church was forced to the fringes of society. In the same 30 April 1944 letter, Bonhoeffer commented that God transcended a human attempt to understand God’s origins.⁵⁰ Religion was the attempt by humanity to put restraints on God, and religious people were those who thought they were acting as God wanted them to. A “religionless” interpretation of the world was one that did not attempt to explain the unexplainable, but rather focused on the world and the things that were explainable.⁵¹

If Bonhoeffer were living in a religionless age, then how would he, as a Christian look and act? He commented that his thoughts on how a Christian should act had changed since writing *Discipleship*: “I thought I could acquire faith by living a holy life,

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 282.

⁴⁹ This idea came from Professor Deborah Goodwin.

⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 282.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

or something like it. I suppose I wrote [*Discipleship*] as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote.”⁵² Bonhoeffer went on to talk of how one could only attempt to be a Christian if he/she lived “...unreservedly in life’s duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world--watching with Christ in Gethsemane.”⁵³ By completely abandoning any apprehension about life, such as where the next meal will come from, where clothes will come from, or where shelter will come from, one became completely reliant on God. This was what it meant to be religionless in the new age for Bonhoeffer: to fall off the cliff of religion, into the arms of God. It was and is something that requires great courage.

Bonhoeffer’s idea has captured the interest of many because in times of crisis, people have a tendency to look at institutions that are not meeting the stress reduction needs of the time and attempt to change them; this point will be commented on further later in the paper. The question arises: How have different people interpreted Bonhoeffer and his ideas of “religionless” Christianity and costly discipleship? There have been a variety of people who have looked at Bonhoeffer, and the answer to that question is varied and complicated.

Section II:

Previous Scholarly Interpretations of Bonhoeffer

⁵² *ibid.*, 369.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 370.

The writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer have been interpreted in different ways by different people and he has remained popular in Christian circles for the past sixty years. Bonhoeffer has been powerful primarily because his words can be used by different sides of many different arguments. It is rare to find a modern theologian who is so commonly used for so many different purposes. This section of the paper deals with the reception of Bonhoeffer by examining the importance of Eberhard Bethge and John W. de Gruchy; Bonhoeffer's popularity in the 1960's; current scholarly understandings of Bonhoeffer's concept of religionlessness; and finally my assessment of those views.

Eberhard Bethge

Eberhard Bethge was and is one of the names most prominently associated with Bonhoeffer scholarship, primarily because it was to Bethge that Bonhoeffer wrote his famous letters from Tegel prison discussing "religionless" Christianity. Bethge wrote a substantial biography of Bonhoeffer, and had total control as to how *Letters and Papers from Prison* was put together. Also, Bethge has become known because of his scholarly efforts to try and encourage the 'correct' study of Bonhoeffer's material.

In 1973 during a lecture while visiting apartheid South Africa, Bethge talked of how he should have spoken up more to all of Bonhoeffer's critics during the sixties; the reason he did not was, "...in the hope that those seriously interested in Bonhoeffer would soon discover their superficiality by getting to know all the writings."⁵⁴ Bethge hoped that those interested in Bonhoeffer would look at all of his works. Bethge was speaking in response to the Radical Theologians who had laid claim to Bonhoeffer as inspiration

⁵⁴Eberhard Bethge, "The Reception and Interpretation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 3.01 (1973): 9.
http://35630.galibproxy.pals.msus.edu/pls/eli/eli_bg.superframe?PID=n00472867_003_01_0001.

for thinking that God had died by looking at only the letters in *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Another way Bethge defended Bonhoeffer was by explaining why Bonhoeffer got involved in politics, specifically the attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler:

When Bonhoeffer joined the political resistance he was protesting concretely against the exclusion of faith from the political process of living and killing which was happening at his time and place in the world. In other words he was demonstrating the deplorable fact that at that time, even the clergy who were members of the Confessing Church became accomplices to murder and terror as long as they were allowed to preach from their pulpits.⁵⁵

This comment re-emphasizes Bonhoeffer's insistence that Christians should live completely in the world; if one is to claim Christ as the example to follow then when faced with injustice one should look to fix that injustice. Bonhoeffer saw his actions of resistance to Hitler as attempting to fix injustice.

Why would Bethge want to present a correct way to study Bonhoeffer? The reason Bethge wanted to defend Bonhoeffer was because of a movement in the 1960's known as "Death of God" theology, or Radical Theology that claimed Bonhoeffer and his idea of "religionless" Christianity as inspiration for believing God was dead.

Death of God Theology

In the April 8 1966 edition of Time magazine, the cover read: "Is God Dead?"⁵⁶ The article explored the idea that God had died, or rather the way God had been understood up until that time had died.⁵⁷ Publisher Bernhard M. Auer wrote in the

⁵⁵ Eberhard Bethge, "Religionless Christianity—A mistake?" *Studies in Religion* vol. 12 no. 1 (1983): 21.

⁵⁶ John T. Elson, "Is God Dead?" *Time* 1966

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 87.

beginning of the magazine that “...no story has been approached with more deliberation than this week’s cover treatment of the contemporary concepts of God.”⁵⁸ The degree to which people of the time were struggling with the issue around God and whether or not he was “dead” was very deep. The death of God theology centered on seeing humanity as completely alone, and does not look to God to solve humanity’s problems.⁵⁹

William Hamilton was one of the scholars who claimed that God had died. In 1965 he wrote of why he felt he had to leave the notion that God was alive: because he read among other things “a few selections of Bonhoeffer’s prison letters.”⁶⁰ Hamilton used Bonhoeffer to legitimize his claim that God was dead, or rather to claim that the way God had been understood until that point was gone. To do this with the limited writings of Bonhoeffer was dangerous because Bonhoeffer was commenting not on God, but on religion and how the church was supposed to portray God in a correct way.

To claim Bonhoeffer as a proponent of the Radical Theology movement was a move that stepped outside of my understanding of Bonhoeffer because Bonhoeffer never claimed God was dead. One of Bonhoeffer’s closest friends, Bethge, wanted to distance Bonhoeffer’s legacy from Radical Theology because it was not a correct way to interpret Bonhoeffer. The closest Bonhoeffer came to claiming that God was dead came from a letter he wrote on 18 July 1944 in which he wrote:

⁵⁸ibid., 21.

⁵⁹ Alan Richardson, ed. *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1969) s.v. “Death of God Theology, The.”

⁶⁰ William Hamilton, “The Shape of a Radical Theology: Among its main themes: the death of God, obedience to Jesus, and a new optimism.” *Christian Century* 82 vol. 40 p. 1219, <http://searchatlaonline.com>.

God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us. The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually.⁶¹

This quote shows that Bonhoeffer still had an understanding that God was “alive”, but that the understanding that he had of God up until that point may have been mistaken.

Whether Bonhoeffer truly believed that God no longer existed was beside the point; he wanted to get Christians to see that they needed to be responsible for the weakness in the world. I maintain that Bonhoeffer did not think that God had died, but that religion and specifically the church’s failure to lead by example, was getting in the way of people knowing the “true” God.

Yet another scholar who took Bonhoeffer to be commenting on God as no longer useful was John A.T. Robinson. His 1966 book was called *Honest to God*, and in it he went through Bonhoeffer’s letters in *Letters and Papers from Prison* and offered his ideas on what they meant to him. Robinson talked of how in order to think about Christianity without religion, there might need to be a new understanding of the image of God.⁶² Robinson did not call for thinking of God as no longer useful to humanity, something that the Radical Theologians did call for. Instead he called for an understanding of God within each person. Instead of waiting for God to act in the world, humans should act in the name of God. Robinson’s ideas were directly inspired by his readings of Bonhoeffer’s letters.⁶³ This was not a correct understanding of Bonhoeffer because Bonhoeffer clearly had a relationship with God and wanted to help other people

⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 360.

⁶² John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press LTD) 1963: 124.

⁶³ *ibid.*, 22-23.

find a relationship with God. If the church had not been mistaken with the type of grace it was preaching, then God would not have been criticized so severely because the church related God to Christians. If the church had gotten it wrong, that meant that the Christians at the time had gotten it wrong also.

John W. De Gruchy

Another person who has been influential in how Bonhoeffer has been received is John W. De Gruchy. De Gruchy was a professor of Christian Studies and Director of the Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa at the University of Cape Town.⁶⁴ In a recent article De Gruchy talked of how Bethge had influenced Bonhoeffer's reception.⁶⁵ He pointed out that Bethge's interpretation of Bonhoeffer was focused on the "...continuity and discontinuity in Bonhoeffer's theological development."⁶⁶ De Gruchy argued that Bethge tried to show how Bonhoeffer struggled to get across what he was trying to say, and at times it came out in a confusing way. This left room for various understandings of Bonhoeffer depending on the circumstance one was in when reading Bonhoeffer.⁶⁷

Also, De Gruchy offered a different explanation as to why Bonhoeffer had been so popular to so many different groups of people: "Another reason for the diverse way in which Bonhoeffer's legacy has been received is the varied and often fragmentary nature

⁶⁴ John W. De Gruchy, ed. "The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer" (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1999) xi.

⁶⁵ John W. de Gruchy, "The reception of Bonhoeffer's theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 98.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 94.

of his written work.”⁶⁸ People can take pieces of Bonhoeffer literature and use it to mean many different things which can lead to making claims like God is no longer alive. De Gruchy made another point when he reminded readers that after returning from New York in 1931 Bonhoeffer was living in a time that did not encourage systematic theological thought.⁶⁹ Bonhoeffer did not have time in his life to sit down and think out his theology carefully. According to De Gruchy, as with Bethge, there have been misunderstandings of Bonhoeffer’s pacifism in the 1930’s, the plot to assassinate Hitler in 1944, and also “religionless Christianity.”⁷⁰ The misunderstandings come up because it is hard to pin down Bonhoeffer’s writing to have a concrete meaning if one looks at the writings alone; when examining the context it becomes easier to see what Bonhoeffer meant.

Peter Selby and the context of Bonhoeffer’s writing

Peter Selby, in an article on Bonhoeffer talked about his life, and why he has remained popular. Selby is an Anglican who serves as Bishop of Worcester, England.⁷¹ He also held a teaching position at Durham University.⁷² It should be emphasized, Selby asserted, that when Bonhoeffer wrote of “...living completely in this world...”⁷³, he had

⁶⁸ *ibid.*,

⁶⁹ *ibid.*,

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 93.

⁷¹ John W. de Gruchy, “Notes on contributors,” *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1999): xiv.

⁷² Peter Selby, “Christianity in a world come of age.” 228.

⁷³ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 369.

just found out that the plot to kill Hitler had failed.⁷⁴ I think that Bonhoeffer realized that he was going to be killed which would be a terribly traumatic experience to go through. This could be a reason why Bonhoeffer wrote what he wrote: because Bonhoeffer was content with his understanding that God was not going to step in and save him from his position in prison.⁷⁵

Selby's argument was that Bonhoeffer saw the world around him as "...passing out of the era of 'religion' as, on the one hand, an emancipation and a historical development and, on the other, as a working out of God's purpose revealed in Christ....that Christ is to be at the centre precisely as and not in spite of God's having been edged out of the world on to the cross."⁷⁶ This meant that Bonhoeffer looked at the world as hurting and suffering, and that Christ needed to be the focus of the world so that the pains of the world could be healed through a personal relationship with Him. Once this relationship was obtained then it was the obligation of the follower of Christ to look at the setting, wherever that may be, and try to heal the pain that was there.

Stephen R. Haynes and *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*

In a recent book on Bonhoeffer, Stephen R. Haynes offered his opinion on why Bonhoeffer has been such a popular theologian: because he combines, "...a rare integrity of word and deed."⁷⁷ Haynes is an Associate Professor of Religion at Rhodes College in

⁷⁴ Peter Selby, "Christianity in a world come of age," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1999), ed. John W. de Gruchy: 240.

⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 370.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 229.

Tennessee. Haynes notes that Bonhoeffer did what he told other people to do, and it is precisely because he did this that he has remained so intriguing to people who hear of his story. In the book, Haynes contends that Bonhoeffer has been viewed as motivation for differing movements: in the United States of America Bonhoeffer has been used as inspiration to oppose tyrannous leaders; in Latin America Bonhoeffer's writings have helped to show how to deal with political oppression and social injustice from a Christian perspective; in South Africa Bonhoeffer was used as motivation to further the resistance movement when apartheid was the official policy of the government; in Asia as motivation for contextualizing theology; in eastern Europe as motivation for political theology and opposing Communism.⁷⁸ Haynes concludes that if Bonhoeffer is to be interpreted correctly, and used by various groups of people as motivation for action in the world, then those groups or people must first examine Bonhoeffer's historical setting.⁷⁹ I agree that Bonhoeffer has been used as motivation for different movements, but what is interesting is the surrounding context for *when* Bonhoeffer was and is used. In the United States of America he became particularly popular as war was mounting; in Africa as the apartheid was oppressing people of African ethnicity; in Latin America when people were being oppressed by their governments; in Asia as guilt about discrimination spread among theologians; in Eastern Europe as communist countries were fighting with democratic countries. All these societal settings were ones that experienced cultural stress.

⁷⁷ Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis 2004), 6.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 40-55.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 175. My interpretation of the last paragraph before the heading "Bonhoeffer and the Jews."

Haddon Wilmer

In an article written to elaborate on *Discipleship*, Haddon Wilmer comments: “It is not the suffering but the fellowship with Christ that is important; that is why the way of the disciples is seen as joyful and triumphant.”⁸⁰ Willmer is a retired professor of theology at the University of Leeds, where he worked from 1966 until 1998. Willmer commented that the relationship with Christ after suffering is most important. I would contend that Bonhoeffer saw the suffering as more important, because it prompted the believer to focus more on Christ.⁸¹ Without having gone through suffering, it is hard to identify with Christ or with a theologian who clings to Christ, because as Bonhoeffer saw it, the Christ story was centered on loving others and suffering for them. This is one reason Bonhoeffer was and currently still is popular among people struggling to follow Christ in Latin America while their governments are oppressing them.⁸² The people in Latin America found solace in the words of Bonhoeffer because those words showed how once the believer obtained a relationship with Christ, it would be easier to follow Christ and to endure suffering.

Willmer sees *Discipleship* not as political resistance literature, but rather as a work that was concerned with the *church* in a traditional Christian society.⁸³ This means that *Discipleship* was not intended to be used to start movements of opposition to

⁸⁰ Haddon Willmer, “Costly Discipleship” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1999), ed. By John W. de Gruchy: 178.

⁸¹ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 194.

⁸² Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*, 48.

⁸³ Haddon Willmer, “Costly Discipleship,” 173.

governments. I agree because Bonhoeffer wrote *Discipleship* before he made a decision to attempt to assassinate Hitler, and was not calling at that time for active political resistance. But, if looking at Bonhoeffer's actions as a whole, specifically around the last two years of his life, it is not hard to understand why *Discipleship* could be viewed as political resistance literature. Bonhoeffer's life led to his involvement in the attempted murder of a tyrant, and a reader of Bonhoeffer who hears of this might be inclined to do the same thing.

In the struggle to rid South Africa of Apartheid during the 1960's and 1970's Bonhoeffer was used as such motivation. One man, Alan Boesak, imprisoned for his speaking out against the Apartheid government, used the biography written by Bethge about Bonhoeffer as motivation for him to maintain his struggle against the government.⁸⁴

David Jensen and "the other"

David H. Jensen is a professor at Austin Theological Seminary and has done much writing on the religious other and the importance of interreligious dialogue.⁸⁵ Jensen comments that Bonhoeffer's idea of religionlessness came about as a new way to interpret Christianity and the church's involvement in the world: "In contrast to a religion that would insulate Christians within the irrelevant confines of their Sunday sanctuaries, Bonhoeffer proposes a 'religionless' form of faith that invokes a return to the Other—the

⁸⁴ Haynes *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*, 50-51. My summary of the stories on the two pages.

⁸⁵ Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, "David H. Jensen", http://www.austinseminary.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=94&Itemid=172.

person of difference—and a return to the world in its turmoil and struggle.”⁸⁶ This means that a correct interpretation of religionlessness is one where the Christian looks to extend religiously motivated action outside of the church on Sundays to include the other six days of the week; to look to anyone and everyone as someone worthwhile, and to look at difference not as a matter of right and wrong, but as valuable commentary on how to interpret the way the world is.⁸⁷

Carolyn M. Jones

Carolyn M. Jones teaches at the University of Georgia and specializes in religion and African American studies. She sees Bonhoeffer’s “religionless Christianity” as “...being active in the participation in the suffering of God and world where you stand.”⁸⁸ To me, this means that to be a Christian one need not seek to go somewhere distant to help others, but to look at one’s current circumstance to see what can be done and doing it. This is why I do not think that one has to necessarily work in the church as a pastor, deacon, or any other position in order to be involved in full time ministry. If one is a Christian, then all one has to do is to look around every day for someone in need of help, no matter what kind of help that is, and do it.

Right and Wrong Interpretation

⁸⁶ David H. Jensen, “Religionless Christianity and the Religious Other: Bonhoeffer’s Invitation to Interreligious Encounter,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 47 no. 0304 (2002): 114. <http://search.atlaonline.com>.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 117.

⁸⁸ Carolyn M. Jones, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison*: Rethinking the Relationship of Theology and Arts, Literature and Religion,” *Literature & Theology* 9 no. 3 (1995): 248.

When considering correct and incorrect understandings of Bonhoeffer, those who have it wrong tend to focus too narrowly on Bonhoeffer's writing near the end of his life. Instead of taking the time to examine carefully the context of Bonhoeffer's life, they instead read the words in *Discipleship* or *Letters and Papers from Prison*. The "death of God" theologians use Bonhoeffer's writing in *Letters and Papers from Prison* as firm theological discourse, for which it was not meant. If using this thinking, it would be inappropriate for anyone, including myself, to use what Bonhoeffer wrote in *Letters and Papers from Prison* for theological discussion. I assert that if one is to correctly interpret Bonhoeffer and his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, they have to be examined in light of what he previously wrote, specifically *Discipleship*. When this is done, it is clear that Bonhoeffer was not commenting on the lack of usefulness of God, but on the church's inadequacy to convey accurately who God was to the people. Also one should note that Bonhoeffer was under stress personally and his culture was under stress and this stress affected his writing.

Section III

The previous sections discussed *Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*, the general reception of Bonhoeffer, and his idea of "religionless" Christianity. The third section will use this understanding to elaborate on how the church should act in the world by focusing on two things: the first is an anthropological view as to why religious movements have a tendency to wax and wane over time, and the second is an examination of two current movements in American Christian circles that I feel have connections to Bonhoeffer's idea of "religionless" Christianity and costly discipleship. The reason for using an anthropological approach to understanding Bonhoeffer is that

even though Bonhoeffer is not always explicitly claimed by the Emerging Church movement, he can still be considered part of the voice of the movement as some of its leaders have acknowledged.⁸⁹ The section argues that the ideas of religionless Christianity and costly discipleship have legs, meaning they have been taken by some and been used to offer a new way to convey the message of Jesus particularly in times of cultural uncertainty.⁹⁰ The movements in this section make little mention of Bonhoeffer, his idea of religionless Christianity or costly discipleship, but show striking similarity to Bonhoeffer's writing. It can also be argued that these movements' response to cultural stress is comparable to Bonhoeffer's.

An anthropological understanding

Anthony F.C. Wallace was an anthropologist who was known for offering analysis of the world, specifically around the phenomenon of cultural change. In a website offering bibliographical information on Wallace, Jessica Rathman notes that "[Anthony Wallace's] main focus of study was the cultural aspects of the cognitive process, primarily when it involved the information that pertained to periods of technological expansion."⁹¹ This means that Wallace focused on how cultures change

⁸⁹ Andrew D. Rowell, "Innovative ecclesiological practices: emerging churches in dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer," http://www.andyrowell.net/andy_rowell/files/bonhoeffer_and_emerging_church_sample_paper.pdf January 31, 2007, (Accessed April 3 2007). Evidence of the claim made that Bonhoeffer can be associated with the emerging church movement because there is someone who is also drawing correlations between the two.

⁹⁰ The idea for this sentence came from a discussion with Deborah Goodwin on March 21, 2007.

⁹¹ The University of Minnesota Mankato eMuseum, "Anthony Francis Clarke Wallace", University of Minnesota Mankato, http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/information/biography/uvwxyz/wallace_anthony.html (Accessed April 6, 2007)

over time in terms of using new technologies or new ideas in the process of acquiring knowledge. In an article entitled “Revitalization Movements” Wallace shows how movements that change cultures, including religious movements, have a tendency to ebb and flow over time; but there are certain criteria that stay consistent within the movements of change.⁹² The five consistent stages within the revitalization process are: (1) steady state, or a time when the culture or movement is not bothering enough people to require change; (2) The period of increased individual stress, or a time when those within the society experience stress to a level that the stress reduction techniques learned until that point no longer work; (3) The period of Cultural Distortion, or a time in the process when it is necessary to distort the understandings of the culture because the culture is no longer meeting the needs of the inhabitants; (4) The period of revitalization, or the time when a new cultural understanding will emerge. Wallace points out that in stage four, someone will come along and introduce a new way of understanding, and that person will have a tendency to be worshipped: “As God is to the prophet, so (almost) is the prophet to his followers.”⁹³ (5) The final stage is a new steady state, because once the culture has been stabilized by the period of revitalization, there is no longer a need to rethink the culture, and relative calm ensues. Wallace explains that the time period over which this process can take is years, decades, centuries, or longer.

An important thing to point out is that there is a cyclical nature to the movement, meaning that revitalization movements tend to start out as a relatively small or grass-roots phenomenon, and then move on to a later stage where the population of the culture

⁹²Anthony F.C. Wallace, “Revitalization Movements” *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956) 88-97.

⁹³ *ibid.*,” 93.

becomes increasingly aware of the movement and follows it. Another important point is that Wallace examines movements from history like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism.⁹⁴ The changes in religious understanding usually come up when there are stresses on the population and the old ways of stress management no longer work.

Bonhoeffer noticed a problem within the culture, and his calling for a religionless Christianity and costly discipleship related directly to the church because the church was responsible for the religious education of the people. Bonhoeffer's idea of thinking about Christianity outside of the bounds of religion is something that could be classified as the fourth stage of the revitalization process. Bonhoeffer began thinking of Christianity in a new way, and what he did has been curiously mirrored by the Emerging Church movement.⁹⁵

Current redefinition/past redefinition

In our society my generation is experiencing a current redefinition: the approval rating of President Bush is dramatically low,⁹⁶ trust in his current administration is also low, and the country is at war. Global warming is brought to the forefront of the news on a regular basis, and the price for oil has gone up affecting a country that is heavily dependent on the fossil fuel.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 91.

⁹⁵ The Emergent Village, "About" <http://www.emergentvillage.com/about/> (Accessed April 17, 2007). This assertion is made on the basis that the emerging church movement was started out of protest because the leaders were not happy with the conventional way the churches they were a part of were operating.

⁹⁶ Jeffrey Jones, "Bush 35% approval rate lowest in most recent quarter lowest to date," The Gallup Pole, April 17 2007. <http://www.galluppoll.com/content/?ci=27223> (Accessed April 17 2007).

During the sixties when the “Death of God” theology was popular, a time of crisis and redefinition went on as well. The Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Gay Rights Movement all redefined the cultural norms of the day. Also, the sixties was the era in which the world largely came to terms with the Holocaust. Not surprisingly the Death of God movement started during this time of cultural stress because there was a need to try and elaborate on the religious understanding at the time; also unsurprisingly the popularity of the book mentioned earlier on the Amazon.com website bestseller list correlates to the crisis that is going on presently. Within each culture there is a need to redefine old ways of stress management that prove to be outdated. Bonhoeffer did this, the Death of God theologians did it, and so is the Emerging Church movement.

Had Bonhoeffer survived his incarceration, he would have written a book that further explained his thinking on how the idea of religionless Christianity would have operated in a church setting. There is evidence for this assertion in *Letters and Papers from Prison* in the “Outline for a book.”⁹⁷ Within that outline Bonhoeffer wants to address the lack of interest he saw by people around him in Jesus.⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer wrote:

Jesus is disappearing from sight. Sociologically: no effect on the masses- interest confined to the upper and lower middle classes. A heavy incubus of difficult traditional ideas. The decisive factor: the church on the defensive. No taking risks for others.⁹⁹

The Emerging Church¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 380-383.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 380.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 381.

¹⁰⁰ While the Emerging Church is not an organized movement requiring capitalization, I choose to capitalize it in order to help the reader follow the argument that Bonhoeffer and religionlessness relate to the Emerging Church movement.

The Emerging Church could also be called the “unchurch” because the movement is continually changing the conceptual understandings of what a church is. Rather than make statements of faith that exclude others who disagree, the Emerging Church movement encourages disagreement and shies away from denominational affiliation. This is similar to what Bonhoeffer wanted near the end of his life as well in *Outline for a Book*: “...antiquated controversies, especially those between the different sects; the Lutheran versus Reformed, and to some extent the Roman Catholic versus Protestant are now unreal.”¹⁰¹

Andrew D. Rowell, Bonhoeffer, and the Emerging Church

In early 2007 Andrew D. Rowell wrote a paper in which he drew some parallels between Bonhoeffer and the Emerging Church movement. The paper was used in a conference that discussed Bonhoeffer and the Emerging Church. Andrew D. Rowell is a visiting professor at Taylor University.¹⁰² Rowell outlines what the Emerging Church movement is when he says: “The [E]merging [C]hurch movement has come to prominence in the last ten years because many mainline and conservative Protestants under the age of forty believed that a rethinking of Christian practices needed to take place in light of a variety of cultural changes in the Western world.”¹⁰³ This comment reinforces my idea that in times of cultural stress, such as changes in the Western world, the church becomes critiqued for not offering more appropriate stress reduction

¹⁰¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 382.

¹⁰² Taylor University, “Andrew D. Rowell,” Taylor University’s Department of Biblical Studies, Christian Education, and Philosophy, http://www.taylor.edu/academics/acaddepts/bscep/faculty/rowell_andrew.shtml (Accessed April 24, 2007).

¹⁰³ Andrew D. Rowell, “Innovative Ecclesiological Practices” January 31, 2007.

techniques. Because the world around the Emerging Church leaders changed, the understandings of the church around them changed as well. Rowell concludes that, “The [E]merging [C]hurch shares Bonhoeffer’s desire to encourage ethical integrity outside of traditional religiosity and to facilitate fellowship.”¹⁰⁴ Bonhoeffer wanted to drop the idea that one church or denomination was right while others were wrong and pick up the idea that the church as a whole should, despite differences, work to try to make the world a better place.

The culture and revitalization movements are always moving from one stage to another. Bonhoeffer saw the culture around him as leaving a time of religion, and he sought to create a new church that would minister to that time by focusing on Jesus and helping others. The Emerging Church leaders do not think that religion is no longer useful, but do think there is a need to change the way the church relates to a younger generation.

The Emerging Church leaders have claim that it is due to declining interest among young people in the church that there has been a need to rethink the way the church relates to that generation.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, it could be that the reason the people in the Emerging Church movement feel attendance is low is because the leaders themselves have had a bad experience in church or because they came from a church that did a poor job of relating to young people. Having had a bad experience would make one more sensitive to further bad experiences. However, according to an article that examined the

¹⁰⁴ibid., 3

¹⁰⁵ Scott Bader-Saye “The Emergent Matrix: A New Kind of Church?” *Christian Century* 121, no.24.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_24_121/ai_n8702468 (Accessed April 6, 2007)

trends in a recent *Gallup Youth Survey*, young people in America are spiritually hungry and desire God to be a part of their lives.¹⁰⁶ I think that if young people had a more attractive venue to express their spiritual curiosity, then there would be more attendance in conventional church settings. Regardless of the numbers of attendance, the leaders of the Emerging Church have decided there needs to be a new way to get Jesus' message across to the world because the old ways were proving unsuccessful as evidenced by the declining numbers of young people in church. Bonhoeffer wanted to do something similar in his *Outline for a Book* as well when he wanted to think of how to bring Jesus message to the "religionless."¹⁰⁷

The claim by the leaders of the lack of involvement of young people in the traditional church, and the actual numbers that show that young people are curious about spirituality, show that the Emerging Church movement is popular for a different reason than just disenfranchisement among young people. It is unclear at this time what that reason could be. But I think the reason for the unpopularity of traditional worship is because the traditional church is not "hip" enough to attract young people who demand visually stimulating, cognitively challenging religious movements.

According to the Emergent Village website, a site that is considered as close to the official website of the movement as there currently is, the Emerging Church movement started because many of the leaders previously in a traditional church setting

¹⁰⁶ D. Michael Lindsay, "Youth on the edge: a profile of American teens- results of a Gallup youth survey" *Christian Century*, October 4, 2003. Findarticles.com, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_20_120/ai_109132353 , (Accessed April 12, 2007).

¹⁰⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 280. I am not claiming that young people are "religionless," but point out that both Bonhoeffer and the Emerging Church attempted to change the way the church operated in the world.

were "...disillusioned and disenfranchised by the conventional ecclesial institutions of the late 20th century."¹⁰⁸ This quote again reinforces a concept within revitalization movements: that when the stress reduction mechanisms (the church) are no longer working (people are not getting their spiritual needs met), then there will emerge a new way of stress reduction (the Emerging Church). Also, this shows similarity to Bonhoeffer because he was clearly disappointed in the way the church related to people, or else he would not have started thought that the time of religion had ended. The website says that "...we seek to live by the Great Commandment: loving God and loving our neighbors- including those who might be considered 'the least of these' or enemies."¹⁰⁹ This relates to Bonhoeffer when he comments on the Great Commandment in *Discipleship*: "For our evil is no different than the evil in others. There is *one* judgement, *one* law, *one* grace."¹¹⁰ This quote shows that Bonhoeffer wanted the disciples of Christ to love each other and enemies because he does not differentiate between evil and those who commit evil. The disciple is called to especially love enemies.

Mars Hill Bible Church and religionless Christianity

In Grand Rapids, Michigan a church movement was started in 1999 that has rapidly grown in popularity. The founder of the movement, Rob Bell, started a church called Mars Hill Bible Church. He recently wrote a book called Velvet Elvis: Repainting

¹⁰⁸ The Emergent Village, "About Emergent Village"
<http://www.emergentvillage.com/about/> (Accessed April 5, 2007).

¹⁰⁹ Emergent Village, "About: Commitment to God in the Way of Jesus,"
<http://www.emergentvillage.com/about-information/values-and-practices>, (Accessed April 27, 2007).

¹¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 174.

the Christian Faith. In the book Bell says something that is similar to Bonhoeffer's understanding of religion when he wrote *Letters and Papers from Prison*: "The moment God is figured out with nice neat lines and definitions, we are no longer dealing with God. We are dealing with somebody we made up. And if we made [God] up, then we are in control."¹¹¹ This echoes Bonhoeffer's idea of religionless Christianity by pointing out God was not a man made concept, but religion was a man made concept.

In Velvet Elvis, Bell does not claim to have any answers, and that the interpretation of the Bible by an individual is an opinion.¹¹² It is this humble approach to the Bible and Christianity that disarms people when thinking of counter-arguments of joining or listening to a church. I think Bell's words in Velvet Elvis are an example of religionless Christianity because they imply that the listener can make up his or her own understandings of Jesus through scripture as he or she goes through life. Bell becomes popular to people who have already been disenfranchised by the church because they are looking for spiritual practices but are unhappy with the current way the church relates to people. Bell's church offers an outlet for that spirituality to go.

The relation between the Mars Hill Bible Church movement and Bonhoeffer's idea of religionless Christianity are: (1) seeking to be involved intimately with the struggles of the community in which it is involved, as demonstrated by Mars Hill's new initiative to feed and shelter every homeless child in West Michigan. (2) By taking risks for others in the form of devoting financial resources to the struggling economy in the

¹¹¹ Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2005), 25.

¹¹² *ibid.*, 27.

world's poorest country of Burundi.¹¹³ This is risky because they are giving a no interest loan to Burundi in hopes that the economy will turn around some day and they will be able to give the money back to Mars Hill Bible Church but there are no guarantees. (3) Preaching that all Christians regardless of their denominational affiliation as well as all people can help in bringing Jesus to the world: "I don't care [about a] person's background, religion, perspective, [or] worldview; I don't care whether they skip the Pledge of Allegiance in the 'under God' [clause of the Pledge of Allegiance]...when Christians are only willing to partner with other Christians, you're telling people about Jesus, [but] you're telling them that [he] doesn't care [about non-Christians]."¹¹⁴ Rob Bell spoke those words in a recent sermon in which he critiqued the traditional church for turning people off to Jesus because they are too stubborn in thinking that Christians should only partner with other Christians in the world. Mars Hill Bible Church makes no claim to ally itself with a particular denomination, and this is also a common trait of Emerging Churches. On the Emergent Village website there is no claim to any particular denomination of Christianity either.¹¹⁵

Solomon's Porch and Costly Discipleship

¹¹³ Mars Hill Bible Church, "Mission" <http://www.marshall.org/mission/>, (Accessed April 27, 2007).

¹¹⁴ Mars Hill Bible Church, "We Already Are (Mathew 28); March 15, 2007," <http://www.marshall.org/teaching/index.php> (Accessed April 24, 2007). Download the teaching and go to minute 44 of the sermon.

¹¹⁵ Emergent Village, "About Emergent Village, Values and Practices, 2. Commitment to the Church in all its forms: We are committed to honor and serve the church in all its forms – Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, Anabaptist. We practice "deep ecclesiology" – rather than favoring some forms of the church and critiquing or rejecting others, we see that every form of the church has both weaknesses and strengths, both liabilities and potential." <http://www.emergentvillage.com/about-information/values-and-practices> (Accessed April 17, 2007).

A second movement that has been started is called Solomon's Porch, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Doug Pagitt started this movement, and is a popular speaker in the Twin Cities. The layout is much the same as that of Mars Hill Bible Church: there is a speaker in the middle, and seating in a circle around it.¹¹⁶ The way the room is laid out distributes power equally to all people in the room. This shows that the leader is not more powerful than the followers but rather is equal. Also, in the "About" section of the Solomon's Porch website the church claims to be holistic; which means that "...all areas of life are interconnected, including faith, time, family, work, body, money, intellect, et al."¹¹⁷ This discourages Bonhoeffer's cheap grace because it shows that faith in Jesus translates to all areas of life and not just on Sundays once a week. Bonhoeffer wanted disciples to take risks for others in *Discipleship*, which is one of the ways Solomon's Porch operates: "We value innovation and are willing to take risks in order to bring glory to God."¹¹⁸ The risk they take is by placing their church building in a poor neighborhood in South Minneapolis and also by encouraging the members to interact actively with the members of that community. Also, Rowell notes how Bonhoeffer wanted the church to create fresh practices in order to "...more fully live out the Sermon on the Mount."¹¹⁹ Solomon's Porch does that through creating its own "home grown" worship music that is

¹¹⁶ Public Broadcasting Station, "The Emerging Church: part one" *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week845/cover.html>,. Click on the "watch this story" link, and look at the way the room is designed in Solomon's Porch.

¹¹⁷ Solomon's Porch, "About Us," http://solomonsporch.com/aboutus_page_group/index.html, (Accessed April 25, 2007).

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, "Our Dreams," http://solomonsporch.com/aboutus_page_group/ourdreams.html, (Accessed April 25, 2007).

¹¹⁹ Andrew D. Rowell, "Innovative Ecclesiological Practices," 17.

not designed to be a concert type of worship, but participatory worship.¹²⁰ Participatory worship means that the songs are all created by the members of the church and sung in a unique way.

Brian McLaren

Brian McLaren is one of the leading voices in the Emerging Church movement in America. He wrote a book published in 2001 called A New Kind of Christian that has been popular among people curious about the Emerging Church movement.¹²¹ In an article on the Emerging Church in a 2004 *Christian Century*, McLaren points out that the Emerging Church should not appeal to the changing mood of the younger generation in America because if that is all the movement does then it is just “emotional manipulation.”¹²² Similarly, in a 2004 *Christianity Today* Brian McClaren said:

This has been evangelicalism’s model. Fundamentally it’s about getting yourself saved- in old style evangelicalism- or improving your life in the new style. Either way the Christian life is really about you and your needs. Once your needs are met then we think about how you can serve the church. And then if there’s anything left over, we ask how the church might serve the world.¹²³

This quote suggests two things: (1) that there are those within the Emerging Church movement who want to appeal to more than just the passing fancy of a new generation in

¹²⁰ Solomon’s Porch, “Worship Gatherings,” http://www.solomonsporch.com/worship_gatherings_pagegroup/index.html, (Accessed April 25, 2007).

¹²¹ Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2001)

¹²² Scott Bader Saye, “The Emergent matrix: a new kind of church?” *Christian Century* November 30, 2004, 20. http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_24_121/ai_n8702468. (Accessed April 6, 2007)

¹²³ Andy Crouch, “The Emergent Mystique: The ‘emerging church’ movement has generated a lot of excitement but only a handful of congregations. Is it the the wave of the future or a passing fancy?” *Christianity Today* vol. 48 no.11, 39.

America and (2) that even the man who is considered one of the leaders of the movement has been jilted by the traditional church. Because McLaren “knows” what evangelicalism’s model is and why it is not working, it can be assumed safely that he also wants to change the way it works in order to improve it, something similar to what Bonhoeffer wanted. As McLaren notes, if there is not solid, careful theological thought brought in to the Emerging Church then all the movement does is appeal to the changing mood of its members; which is not what Bonhoeffer would have wanted. Bonhoeffer wanted to appeal to the hearts and convictions of the people, not their changing needs for entertainment. If he wanted to appeal to the complacency in Christians during the 1930’s then he would not have been so critical of the church preaching cheap grace.

My Analysis

In order to properly understand religionless Christianity as presented by Bonhoeffer in *Letters and Papers from Prison* one must first read *Discipleship* and note the similarities of the two writings. Bonhoeffer offered criticism of the church and the way it did not cling to the core message of Jesus as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. I agree with Bonhoeffer that religion and Christianity are two different things, because had those who claimed to follow Christ during the Holocaust been serious about that claim, there would have been more opposition and resistance to the mass killings of millions of innocent lives. Those who did not protest got caught up in religion and following the leadership of a church movement that had betrayed its allegiance to Christ, which was not Christianity as Bonhoeffer saw it. Following Jesus meant allying oneself

so passionately to the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount that one should be willing to lose one's life before giving up that allegiance.¹²⁴

In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer had the understanding that in order to follow Christ, the teachings of Jesus should have affected the motivations of the believer. For example, when Jesus called for the rich man to sell all of his possessions to the poor in Mathew 19, he was referring to the rich man letting go of the inner security he found within the riches and finding security in Jesus.¹²⁵ The man found his motivation and identity in riches and not in Jesus.

Near the end of his life Bonhoeffer talked of how faith in Jesus happened not as a result of religious indoctrination, but by living totally in the world.¹²⁶ The Christian should be actively looking for those who are suffering or hurting and offering assistance to those people. Bonhoeffer saw a problem with the religious interpretation of Christianity because that interpretation led believers to be distant from the problems of the world; there were Christians who claimed allegiance to Hitler, did not object to war, and also people who needed help (the Jews and others persecuted in the Holocaust) who were not being helped. It is debatable whether or not there are similarities between the cultural setting of Germany during World War Two and the present social scene in The United States of America. With this in mind it is necessary for Christians to look at who is being marginalized and oppressed in America and the world and try to help them in any way possible. Whether those people are close or far, they still need assistance. Movements like Mars Hill Bible Church and Solomon's Porch are doing that.

¹²⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 45.

¹²⁵ Mathew 19: 16-22 (NRSV)

¹²⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 369-370.

Had Bonhoeffer lived longer, he would have used the popular medium of the time, literature, to get across to people what he thought about the church; Emerging Churches are also using a popular medium, technology, to reach young people who are not being reached by the traditional church. This is also a critique of the Emerging Church movement because it appeals only to the current generation's need to be visually stimulated with flashing lights, videos, and music. I feel that it does not matter how the message of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is presented to the audience, because it has changed with every generation already. As long as the presenter has an understanding of the Sermon on the Mount that deals with helping others and taking risks for them, then however the message is presented to the listener is appropriate.

Bonhoeffer saw the need to change the way Jesus was being presented by the Church, because the world around him was falling apart and religious opposition to it was minimal; innocent people were dying and the church was standing by.¹²⁷ Bonhoeffer saw this as an outrage and a violation of his understanding of Christianity. By attempting to question the way he looked at Christianity Bonhoeffer was trying to come to terms with how Christianity could survive in a world where people did terrible things to each other. This question is something every Christian must do at some point during his or her life. Bonhoeffer wanted the church to reinvent itself and called for it to give away all of its possessions and for the clergy to live on handouts or possibly engage in a secular job.¹²⁸ This is an example of the radical nature of Bonhoeffer and the extreme way he wanted

¹²⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 280.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, 383.

the church to change its practices in order to better help those in the world who needed help.

One could argue that despite the faults in the church, there are still good things about it. This is true; however, like in any sport the emphasis should not be on the strength of the player but on the weakness. If a player only works on what he/she is good at, then soon the weaknesses are neglected and a player becomes one dimensional. In Bonhoeffer's day the church was weak on relating to those who were considered outsiders, and today the church is weak in trying to relate to people under the age of forty. The church does great things in this country, and I am not attacking those great things. What I am calling for, and what I think Bonhoeffer called for as well, is for a rethinking of how the church relates to people.

The Emerging Church movement echoes the call by Bonhoeffer to rethink or reinterpret the way humanity understands God and to extend that understanding to helping those who need help. It is too early to tell whether or not the Emerging Church movement will continue to meet the needs of a new generation, or if it will pass away. I am confident it will be around for a long time. Regardless, it is important to understand that humanity has never been stagnant in its understanding of God, Jesus, religion, and scripture. There have been those in the past who have challenged the way we look at God: Jesus, Luther, Bonhoeffer, Robinson, Bell. To challenge an understanding of God is a good thing, something that every generation of humanity has done before. Even the "Death of God" theologians were attempting to rethink their understanding of the world and how God interacted with it. This challenging of God and the new understanding of

God comes up when the culture is faced with a crisis. In my generation that crisis is the war in Iraq, global warming, and distrust about those in power.

Future Directions

Bonhoeffer was not willing to give up on God, but questioned whether or not his understanding of God was flawed. His question dives deep into the nature of Christians: whether or not Christians really apply the teachings of Jesus to their lives. Bonhoeffer wanted Christians to alter their understanding of the role in which religion played in their everyday lives. The scholars who attempted to claim that Bonhoeffer wanted to leave God behind and deal strictly with humanity's understanding of reality without God were mistaken because Bonhoeffer believed that the church, and not God, needed to be changed. The church was the vehicle that was used to educate people about God. God does not change, but our interpretations of God do; when we start to cling to our understanding of God in a certain way, then we no longer become open to letting God show us new ways about who God is. Bonhoeffer went through the process of discovering God in a new way and wanted to change the way the church preached about the God and Jesus from the Bible.

In a March 2007 Gallup poll that attempted to assess the religious pulse of America, the question was asked: "What is the most important reason why you do not attend church or synagogue?" Of those polled who did not regularly go to church, the largest response (24%) was because they did not agree with organized religion.¹²⁹ This

¹²⁹Frank Newport, The Gallup Pole, "Just why do Americans attend church?" <http://www.galluppoll.com/content/?ci=27124&pg=2>, (Accessed April 17, 2007). I admit I do not focus on the majority of people who claimed they do attend some type of service, but for the purposes of my argument I wanted to focus on the people who claimed they did not attend a church or synagogue regularly.

shows that some people can and do have legitimate, valid reasons why they do not want to go to church, and the Emerging Church appeals to that group of people. The Emerging Church appeals to the disenfranchised or turned off by offering an alternative way to think spiritually about God and the teachings of Jesus.

Bonhoeffer wanted to change the way the church related to the people in order to get Christians to be more aware of those around them. He wanted this to happen by dropping the institutional restrictions of the church, and open it up to further debate as to what was correct or incorrect practice.¹³⁰ Had Bonhoeffer lived past the time of his incarceration it is likely that he would have further questioned what a church was to look like in the context through a book he wanted to write. The Emerging Church movement is also doing this. On the website for the Solomon's Porch movement the website states that the church does not have a mission, it is a mission.¹³¹ The website further adds: "The church is never to be the withdrawn or isolated end user of the gospel of Jesus; rather, we receive it so that we may be equipped and sent into the world to love our neighbors and serve 'the least of these.'"¹³²

Like Bonhoeffer, I want the church to take more risks for others than what I have seen in my experience. I want to stir up the dying embers of the fire. Most of the churches that I have gone to in the past all have people in them who are like me, and very few people who are different. Diversity is a great thing because it gives people the

¹³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 383.

¹³¹ Solomon's Porch, "About Us" http://www.solomonsporch.com/aboutus_page_group, (Accessed April 22, 2007).

¹³² *ibid.* Note the similarity between this statement from Solomon's Porch and how Bonhoeffer wanted the church to oppose the world within the world.

opportunity to learn how different people live and more importantly how other people need help. Also, many churches that I have gone to put more resources in to building a worship center or a new sound system than on helping the poor in the inner city less than 15 miles away.¹³³ The churches that I have been a part of are more concerned with self preservation and building new buildings than with helping the poor. Then why do I associate myself with these churches? Because there are limited other places for me to go here the words of Jesus preached.

In my opinion, what ends up happening when there is not diversity and challenge preached on a regular basis is that people start to become complacent in their understanding of Jesus; following Jesus means that life will be easy and full of joy and as a result people are ill prepared spiritually for when unexpected bad things happen. Bonhoeffer spoke of costly discipleship and a “religionless” Christianity that reaches out to the world without trying to convert, but rather to aide.¹³⁴ I think those within a church should go out in to the community and try to make it better without thinking of it as a “mission” trip and to stop trying to convert people through words and arguments. Let the actions of the believer do the talking. This will happen when the Sermon on the Mount is taken seriously and Jesus’ words of helping our neighbor reach the hearts of Christians.

¹³³I am not willing to name the church, but the website of it is: <http://www.atgrace.com/about/financialupdate.php>. Notice how the church is over \$2 million in debt since it changed locations in 2004, a project that cost roughly \$10 million. Instead of opening a new building, why not open a new homeless shelter, or donate the \$10 million to needy families in the area?

¹³⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 280. My understanding of the reason why Bonhoeffer wanted to reach out to those who were not being affected by the words of Jesus and yet still claimed to be Christians.

It is clear that there are many, many people in this country who are fascinated by the idea that God may not exist or else why would such books as The God Delusion be among the best sellers at Amazon.com? This is the time for the church to step up and be a serious agent for change within the world and among my generation in particular; it will happen when the church takes the initiative to address issues that affect the younger generations of people in this country more. A lot of people in my generation feel the traditional church is an inadequate place to practice spirituality or even Christianity, as noted above in the surveys and analysis of the Emerging Church movement. Further evidence of this claim can be seen by looking at a study conducted by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research in the year 2000. It showed that while attendance is dropping in church, spiritual curiosity as a whole is growing.¹³⁵

Bonhoeffer wanted the church to take more responsibility for its role in the world to be the voice and body of Christ. I think that this is a great opportunity for the church to change the way it has been reaching people of my generation and make it apparent that having a relationship with Christ is a great thing, even if it requires sacrifice. Bonhoeffer can be a part of that process by giving a strong example of someone who wanted actions to speak louder than words when attempting to make the world a better place.

¹³⁵ Diane Swanbrow, University of Michigan News Service, January 11, 2000 “Church Attendance Drops,” <http://www.umich.edu/news/index.html?Releases/2000/Jan00/r011100>, (Accessed April 28, 2007), “The established churches today may be on the wrong wavelength for most people in post-industrial societies [like the United States of America], but new theologies, such as the theology of environmentalism, or New Age beliefs, are emerging to fill an expanding niche.”

Annotated Bibliography

Amazon.com, "Bestseller Books,"

http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/51546011/ref=pd_ts_pg_2/104-6056649-2889566?ie=UTF8&pg=2, (Accessed April 26, 2007).

This website was used in order to help me draw a correlation between the cultural crisis and the questioning of God. Also, it helped me to see that the questioning of God is something that happens frequently throughout history. I have not read The God Delusion, but use it the title to show that the concept of questioning God is popular today.

Bethge, Eberhard. "Religionless Christianity- a mistake?" *Studies in Religion*, vol. 12 no.1 (1983), 19-26.

This source talked of how Bonhoeffer's idea of religionless Christianity was not a mistake by Bonhoeffer. The idea of religion being no longer useful to humanity was a fact that urged Bonhoeffer to understand who Christ was.

Bonhoeffer wanted to better understand Christ and how Christ related to people.

_____. "The Reception and Interpretation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 3.01 (2006), 6-17.

This article was useful in helping me come to an understanding of the reasons Bethge wanted to clarify and defend Bonhoeffer. Bethge wanted those interested in Bonhoeffer to examine *all* of Bonhoeffer's works.

Bell, Rob. *Velvet Elvis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

This book was helpful in giving me a source for comparison to Bonhoeffer's claim that God and religion are two different things. Useful because it gave me some textual evidence that Bonhoeffer's idea has somehow showed up sixty years later by someone who claims not to have known that Bonhoeffer wrote something similar to it.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Letters and Papers from Prison: New Greatly Enlarged Edition*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, (New York: Simon & Schuster Press, LTD, 1997).

This collection is one of two primary sources written by Bonhoeffer, but compiled and edited by his former student and friend Eberhard Bethge. Useful because it offers the textual evidence for this paper.

_____. *Discipleship* vol. 4, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, trans. Martin Kuske and Ilse Todt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

The other source used as a primary document in the paper. Useful because it offers Bonhoeffer's theological understandings before he wrote *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Crouch, Andy. "The Emergent Mystique: The 'emerging church' movement has generated a lot of excitement but only a handful of congregations. Is it the

the wave of the future or a passing fancy?" *Christianity Today* vol. 48 no. 11, 37-43.

This article was helpful because it gave me information on the Emerging Church and some of the leaders within the movement. I was able to get some quotes from Brian McClaren that echoed Bonhoeffer when thinking about how the church can better relate to people.

De Gruchy, John. "The Reception of Bonhoeffer's Theology," *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* edited by John W. de Gruchy, 93-112. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

This article gave me a clear and concise understanding of the reception of Bonhoeffer. De Gruchy points out that because of the problem in translating bonhoeffer's works, there have been problems in coming to a uniform understanding of what Bonhoeffer's ideas truly mean. His most useful point was that Bonhoeffer's letters in *Letters and Papers from Prison* were not meant to be Theologically authoritative.

Emergent Village, "About Emergent Village, <http://www.emergentvillage.com/about/> (Accessed April 17, 2007).

This website is one of the headquarters for the Emergent Church movement. It offers a concise explanation about the movement and why it believes what it believes.

Grace Church, "Grace Church Financial Update,"

<http://www.atgrace.com/about/financialupdate.php> (Accessed April 27, 2007)

This website was consulted briefly to point out that a church that I have had experience with in the past and offer some numbers backing up my claim that the church was more interested in making a new building than with giving to the poor or the needy.

Hamilton, William. "The Shape of a Radical Theology: Among its main themes: the death of God, obedience to Jesus, and a new optimism." *Christian Century* 82 vol. 40, p 1219-1222. <http://search.atlaonline.com>

This article gave me the reason a Radical Theologian wanted to use Bonhoeffer's writings to show how God had died. Hamilton wanted to use Bonhoeffer were because he had a limited understanding of Bonhoeffer and did not mention any of Bonhoeffer's earlier writings such as *Discipleship*.

"A secular Theology for a world come of age," *Theology Today* vol. 18, no. 4, p 435-460. <http://search.atlaonline.com>

This source helped me to better understand where Hamilton specifically interpreted Bonhoeffer's writing to mean the death of God. From my reading of the article, the main argument for Hamilton lies in a letter written by Bonhoeffer on July 16, 1944.

Haynes, Stephen R. *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint*.

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

This book provided evidence to support my claim that Bonhoeffer has been used in support of many different understandings of the world and religion. Useful because it offered me specific examples of people who had used Bonhoeffer as motivation to claim that political resistance was appropriate, or that murder was appropriate.

Huff, Douglas. "Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)" *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, James Fieser, PhD. editor <http://www.iep.utm.edu/b/bonhoeff.htm> (Accessed March 13, 2007).

This website article was helpful because it gave me some background information on Bonhoeffer and his struggle on whether or not to become involved with the resistance movement. He wrote *Ethics* as an understanding of why he got involved with trying to kill Hitler.

Jensen, David H. "Religionless Christianity and the Religious Other: Bonhoeffer's Invitation to Interreligious Encounter." *Brethren Life and Thought* 47 no. 0304, 113-120.

Jensen also comments on how Bonhoeffer saw religion as a man-made attempt to understand God. He offers the idea that Bonhoeffer wanted Christians to get out of the church building and to help others instead of being concerned about themselves.

_____, "Religionless Christianity and Vulnerable Discipleship: The Interfaith Promise of Bonhoeffer's Theology" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 38:2-3, Spring- Summer 2001.

This article outlined how Bonhoeffer viewed religion and religionlessness and came to many of the same conclusions that I did. Religion is created by humans to know the divine and a religionless understanding is one that seeks to take risks for others, approaches everyone with humility, and looks to know God through Jesus teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jones, Carolyn M., "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*: Rethinking the Relationship of Theology and Arts, Literature and Religion," *Literature & Theology* 9, no. 3 (1995): 243-259.

Jones offered a unique understanding of religionless Christianity for me: that when we throw off our old understanding of God, then we stand in the presence of God. The source was useful because it offered me a sound idea on how to practice religionless Christianity: by getting out of my comfort zone and taking risks to help other people in need.

Jones, Jeffrey, "35% approval rate lowest in most recent quarter lowest to date," *The Gallup Pole* April 17, 2007, <http://www.galluppoll.com/content/?ci=27223>, (Accessed April 17, 2007).

This website was used to give me evidence to back up the claim that trust in the current administration is low. If there were high approval ratings, then more

Americans would trust Bush.

Kelly, Geoffrey B., "Prayer and action for justice: Bonhoeffer's spirituality," *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* edited by John W. de Gruchy, 246-268. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

This article was helpful in showing me that Bonhoeffer was disappointed in the church for not standing up to Hitler. Bonhoeffer thought that the church had cheapened itself by following Hitler, and this was not acceptable.

Lindsay, D. Michael. "Youth on the Edge: a Profile of American Teens- Results of a Gallup Youth survey" *Christian Century*, October 4, 2003

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_20_120/ai_109132353, (Accessed April 12, 2007).

This article gave me some numbers to work with in regards to understanding high school students' religious demographics in 2003. The most useful information showed that young people are spiritually curious and hungry to know more about religion and church.

Mars Hill Bible Church, "Theology", <http://www.marshill.org/about/coreBeliefs.php> (Accessed April 17, 2007).

This website from the Mars Hill Bible Church gave me some understanding as to the core values of the church: offering hope to those who feel God has abandoned them.

_____, "Teachings: Leaving control for faith" March 11, 2007, <http://www.marshill.org/teaching/index.php>, (Accessed April 17, 2007).

The online teachings from Mars Hill are the best way for someone interested in Mars Hill Bible Church and Rob Bell to find out what they are preaching and doing in the world. I have been listening to the sermons posted online in attempt to figure out if there are any connections to Bonhoeffer's ideas on how the church can better relate to the marginalized and oppressed in the world.

Nielsen, Kirsten Busch. "The Concept of Religion and Christian Doctrine: The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Reconsidered." *Studia Theologica*, 57 (2003): 4-19.

She argues that Bonhoeffer saw religion and sin as connected and that Bonhoeffer wanted to distinguish between the two by forming a new understanding of religion that was positive. Useful because it offered me a optimistic understanding of religion; when the sources have been dominated by those who view religion as the problem.

Newport, Frank, The Gallup Pole, "Just why do Americans attend church?"

<http://www.galluppoll.com/content/?ci=27124&pg=2>, (Accessed April 17, 2007).

-This survey was used to help give me evidence of why people do not go to church and why the church is viewed as irrelevant in some peoples' lives. The

statistic that showed the largest group of people who do not go to church is because they have a disagreement with organized religion and/or what the church/synagogue preaches.

Public Broadcasting Service, "The Emerging Church: part one" *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week845/cover.html>, (Accessed April 6, 2007).

-This website was helpful because it gave me solid background information on the Emerging Church and what it is all about in America. The video on the site was particularly helpful because it offered some visual information on the layout of Solomon's Porch, as well as other "emerging" movements in America.

Robinson, John A.T., *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press LTD)

-This book helped me understand the movement in the sixties to redefine God. While Robinson was not a "Death of God" theologian, he wanted people to rethink the idea of God. He wanted people to look inwards for God and not outwards i.e. to some distant place. Useful in helping give me a feel for how those who read Bonhoeffer felt in the sixties about God.

Rowell, Andrew D. "Innovative Ecclesiological Practices: Emerging Churches in Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer," January 31, 2007, http://www.andyrowell.net/andy_rowell/files/bonhoeffer_and_emerging_church_sample_paper.pdf, (Accessed April 25, 2007)

This paper is my evidence that Bonhoeffer is used to try to relate the Emerging Church movement to Bonhoeffer and his idea of religionless Christianity as I see the term.

Selby, Peter, "Christianity in a World Come of Age," *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* edited by John W. de Gruchy, 226-245. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

His argument centered on seeing the varied interpretations of Bonhoeffer's idea of "religionless" Christianity as good because those interpretations force readers to engage with modernity. Also he made an interesting point when observed that Bonhoeffer wrote of living completely in the world the day after he learned of the plot to assassinate Hitler had failed.

Solomon's Porch, "About Us" http://www.solomonsporch.com/aboutus_page_group/ (Accessed April 22, 2007).

This website was used to gather information about the Solomon's Porch movement in order to help me understand what a church that is associated with the emerging church movement says about itself. It was helpful because it helped me to find out if the movement considered itself to be involved with the world or not. Solomon's Porch considers itself to be involved with their community.

Swanbrow, Diane. *The University of Michigan News Service*, January 11, 2000 “Church Attendance Drops,”
<http://www.umich.edu/news/index.html?Releases/2000/Jan00/r011100>, (Accessed April 28, 2007).

This website article gave me evidence to claim that while church attendance is dropping the spiritual curiosity of people is growing. This correlates to the Emerging Church movement by showing that church attendance is in fact dropping.

Taylor University, ““Andrew D. Rowell,” Taylor University’s Department of Biblical Studies, Christian Education, and Philosophy,
http://www.taylor.edu/academics/acaddepts/bscep/faculty/rowell_andrew.shtml
 (Accessed April 25, 2007).

This website helped me to understand who Andrew Rowell is and to affirm his scholarly status.

University of Minnesota Mankato eMuseum, “Anthony Francis Clarke Wallace.” The University of Minnesota Mankato,
http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/information/biography/uvwxyz/wallace_anthony.html
 (Accessed April 6, 2007)

This website was used to give me some background information on who Anthony F. C. Wallace was as a scholar. He is still alive, but I refer to him in the past tense because the article used in my paper was written in 1956.

Vahanian, Gabriel. *No Other God*. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1966

This source was consulted to give me a better understanding of a “Death of God” theologian. Helpful in seeing what parts of *Letters and Papers from Prison* are commonly looked at for the argument of the death of God.

Wallace, Anthony F.C. “Revitalization Movements” *American Anthropologist*, 58 (1956), 88-97.

This source helped me to understand better why the idea of religionless Christianity might be popular in the current context. Useful because it offers me alternative explanations why Bonhoeffer might be so popular. His theories also give me an understanding of how an anthropologist might understand religion.

Willmer, Haddon, “Costly Discipleship” *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* edited by John W. de Gruchy, 173-189. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

This article was most useful because it pointed out that Bonhoeffer’s idea of following Christ might directly lead to death as a metaphor. It meant an inner death that happened when one lets go of apprehension and clings to Jesus.

Wustenberg, Ralk K. *A Theology of Life: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Religionless Christianity* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.

This secondary source analyzes Bonhoeffer’s idea of religionless Christianity.

He offers a very complicated, often confusing analysis. It was helpful because it gave me some useful ideas on where to take my paper.