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Destruction and Restoration of Genuine Human Community in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Creation and Fall*

PATRICK S. FRANKLIN

INTRODUCTION

PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN attracted to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Many respect him as a hero of the resistance movement and leader of the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Many others know him as a writer of insightful devotional classics, such as [*Cost of*] *Discipleship*, *Life Together*, and *Prayerbook of the Bible*. Some are captivated by the creative, courageous, and suggestive and innovative quality of his later theological writings, especially *Letters and Papers from Prison* and his *Ethics*. Still others have been drawn to the centrality of friendship in Bonhoeffer's life (as evidenced in and in his personal letters), especially his deep friendship with Eberhard Bethge (his closest friend, biographer, and frequent theological conversation partner), but also his receptivity and openness to friends from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, such as Jean Lasserre (a French pacifist), Albert Fisher (an African American, with whom Bonhoeffer attended Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem during his time in the USA), Erwin Sutz (a Swiss theological student who was instrumental

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in arranging for Bonhoeffer to meet Karl Barth), Paul Lehmann (a student at Union Seminary, who helped deepen Bonhoeffer's appreciation for the plight of the oppressed and the importance of civil rights), and George Bell (a bishop in England who became an important ally during the resistance period). Recently, Bonhoeffer's life-long devotion to ministering to and caring for young people—whether young children in Sunday school, or poor and underprivileged kids, or teens in youth groups, or university students in discussion groups—has been celebrated and explored theologically.¹

During his own life Bonhoeffer invested himself deeply in relationships and community, and many—students, teachers, theologians, pastors, and church congregants of various ages and backgrounds—found themselves drawn to him. He had a sharp mind, a deep interest in people, and a winsome personality. Throughout his theological career, he was fascinated with ecclesiology and especially the nature and expression of church and of genuine Christian community. His reflections on Christian community in his (now classic) book *Life Together* are profound and continue to be a source of spiritual inspiration, theological reflection, ecclesial imagination, and practical instruction to pastors, theologians, church and parachurch leaders, and thoughtful Christian believers all over the world.

While most of Bonhoeffer's admirers are familiar with *Life Together*, many are less familiar with (or even unaware of) the development of its central theological themes in Bonhoeffer's earlier works, namely *Sanctorum Communio*, *Act and Being*, the *Christology Lectures*, and *Creation and Fall*. This essay will explore Bonhoeffer's theology of community in the latter book. *Creation and Fall* is a fascinating work for many reasons. It helpfully sees the Old Testament as an important source for ecclesiological reflection, whereas too often people begin their thinking about the church with the New Testament (e.g., Acts 2, 4) and thus fail to grasp important aspects of the church's *telos*, especially its connection to biblical and theological anthropology. It draws important doctrinal themes together, including creation, christology, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. And, as a theological work, it represents an important point of transition in

1. See Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*.

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Bonhoeffer's writing, connecting his earlier academic work with his later contemplative, devotional, and ethical writings. *Creation and Fall* is not a flawless book; but it is a highly insightful, creative, suggestive, provocative, contextual, and theologically stimulating piece of writing, worthy of attention and consideration.

A final word of introduction before proceeding: It is a great honour to dedicate this chapter contribution to Dr. Gus Konkell. While we never formally worked together at Providence Theological Seminary in Manitoba, Canada (though as outgoing President, he did interview me as a candidate for the position of Assistant Professor of Theology and Ethics in November, 2011), we have had many opportunities to connect and discuss matters of life, faith, Bible, and theology. Whether during Gus's visits to teach modular classes at Providence, or at meetings of the Canadian-American Theological Association, or by personal correspondence through email, Gus has been generous in providing ongoing encouragement, advice and wisdom, feedback on presented papers and articles, and dialogue and perspective on ideas and issues over which I have wrestled. I regard him as a model Christian scholar: deeply devoted to loving God and loving others, deeply committed to excellent biblical and theological scholarship, and deeply immersed in Christian community at many levels (church, academy, broader networks, friends, and colleagues). Thank you, Gus.

A THEOLOGICAL EXPOSITION

Reading *Creation and Fall* is not like reading a typical modern commentary written by an Old Testament scholar working in the professional guild of academic biblical studies. Thus, before explicating the theology of human community in *Creation and Fall*, it is important to identify and understand Bonhoeffer's interpretive aims and methodological commitments. Most significantly, Bonhoeffer's approach to the text in this work is decidedly and intentionally theological, as his subtitle suggests (*A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*).² Bonhoeffer

2. His previous two published books, *Sanctorum Communio* (pub. 1930, an updated version of Bonhoeffer's doctoral dissertation) and *Act and Being* (pub. 1931, an updated version of Bonhoeffer's *Habilitation*), were more philosophical and systematic in nature. See also: Godsey, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 119–43; Bonhoeffer,

does not claim, or even aim, to be doing something like ‘pure exegesis’ or ‘presuppositionless exegesis’ when explicating Gen 1–3. Following the example of Karl Barth, Bonhoeffer takes a post-critical approach to the text,³ which breaks free of the epistemological and methodological limitations of the Enlightenment and the trends in modern biblical and theological scholarship stemming from it.⁴ Bonhoeffer does not discard the methods of grammatical-historical criticism, or the importance of serious historical scholarship,⁵ but he relativizes and subjugates them to serve his primary theological and ecclesiological commitments and aims.⁶ “That is, he in principle accepted the findings of historical and literary criticism but sought to move *beyond* them to grapple with the question, What is the word of God as it addresses itself to us today in this scripture?”⁷

Bonhoeffer was an early advocate and practitioner of what we now refer to as the theological interpretation of Scripture.⁸ Theological interpretation is defined not primarily by its methods (its practitioners employ a variety of methods), but by its commitments, concerns, posture or orientation(s), interpretive aims, and intentional habits and

“The Interpretation of the New Testament,” in *No Rusty Swords*, 308–25; and Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 58–65.

3. De Gruchy, “Editor’s Introduction,” 7.

4. For a brief discussion of this history, see Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*, 13–53.

5. Bonhoeffer took classes with the great liberal theologian, Adolf von Harnack, and was impressed with his emphasis on history. Bonhoeffer looked to Harnack as a mentor and often walked to school with him. He contributed to a Festschrift dedicated to Harnack in 1926, and spoke at Harnack’s memorial service on behalf of Harnack’s students (his speech was published). See: Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 27–30, 58–59; and Marsh, *Strange Glory*, 43–46, 99.

6. As Bonhoeffer (*Creation and Fall*, 22) puts it, “This is its presupposition [that the Bible is the book of the church] and this presupposition constitutes its method; its method is a continual returning from the text (as determined by all the methods of philological and historical research) to this presupposition.”

7. De Gruchy, “Editor’s Introduction,” 7.

8. See, for example, Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God*; Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*; Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*; Vanhoozer, Bartholomew, and Treier, *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament*; Vanhoozer, Treier, and Wright, *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*; and Webster, *Holy Scripture and The Domain of the Word*.

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practices. Above all, theological interpreters seek to keep theological concerns primary.⁹ This does not mean simply mining the Bible for propositional content related to particular doctrines and their construction; rather, and more broadly, it means seeking to indwell the biblical text in order to encounter and attend to the triune God that is revealed and actively speaks in and through it. “In this way, theology becomes a form of scriptural interpretation, not simply its result.”¹⁰ This endeavor rests upon explicit commitments held by the interpreter about the nature and *telos* of Scripture and the God that ordained, inspired, sanctified, and now illumines it.¹¹ As Stephen Fowl writes, “Scripture needs to be understood in the light of a doctrine of revelation that itself flows from Christian convictions about God’s triune life. Scripture is a gift from the triune God that both reflects and fits into God’s desire to bring us into ever deeper fellowship with God and each other.”¹² Thus, “theological interpretation . . . will involve those habits, dispositions, and practices that Christians bring to their varied engagements with

9. Watson, *Text, Church and World*, vii.

10. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*, 39. In addition, theological interpretation is first and foremost a practice of the church and is thus ecclesially oriented (23), uses Scripture “as a way of ordering and comprehending the world” rather than the other way around (23), involves reading guided by the rule of faith (29), recognizes Christ as the centre of Scripture and thus the subject of both the OT and the NT (33–37), accepts that theology – not textual and hermeneutical theories – provides the *telos* for reading scripture (39), employs the methods of grammatical-historical criticism when helpful, but also gains from the insights of pre-modern forms of exegesis such as figural reading (56), and is formed by practices laying at the centre of Christian life and leading to the cultivation of virtue, such as: truth seeking/telling; repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation; and patience (66–70).

11. For a rigorous and fascinating theological discussion of these themes, and their relation to conventional biblical scholarship, see Webster, *Holy Scripture* (chapter 1).

12. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*, 13. Drawing on the work of John Webster, Fowl writes, “God’s self-revelation to humans is both the source and content of a Christian doctrine of revelation. Revelation is directly dependent upon God’s triune being and it is inseparable from God’s freely willed desire for loving communion with humans. In this light, the written text of Scripture is subsidiary to and dependent upon a notion of revelation that is itself directly dependent on God’s triune being.” (Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*, 6).

Scripture so they can interpret, debate, and embody Scripture in ways that will enhance their journey toward their proper end in God.”¹³

Reading Scripture theologically entails, in addition, an adequate self-awareness on the part of the interpreter,¹⁴ which includes knowledge of oneself (including one’s virtues and vices) and of one’s present context (socio-cultural, ethnic, philosophical, ecclesial, community/school/social context of interpretation, etc.). For example, Stephen Fowl underscores the importance of the ethical formation of the reader for interpreting Scripture well and Francis Watson points to a three-fold orientation situating the reader theologically (before God) to text, church, and world.¹⁵ Taken together, their insights suggest that theological interpretation is a holistic practice, aiming to bring *the whole reader* (and their context) before *the whole of Scripture*, to be addressed and transformed through Word and Spirit by the Triune God who is *Lord over the whole of Reality*. Thus, theological interpretation seeks to move beyond the dualisms¹⁶ posited by modernity and often reinforced methodologically within the guilds of modern biblical and theological

13. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*, 14.

14. Thus, Calvin wisely begins his famous *Institutes*, a work which he intended as a guide for reading Scripture, with the words: “Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves” (Calvin, *Institutes* I.I.1–3, 37).

15. For a detailed introduction to the work of these two prominent voices in theological interpretation, see my chapter “Francis Watson and Stephen E. Fowl as Theological Interpreters of Scripture.” For the relevant works by the authors, see especially: Fowl, *Engaging Scripture; Philippians*; and Fowl and Jones, *Reading in Communion*; and Watson, *Text, Church and World*; and *Text and Truth*.

16. Examples of these dualisms include objectivity-subjectivity, reason-faith, facts-values, description-prescription, ‘what a text meant’ vs. ‘what a text means,’ past-present, text-reader, and so forth. Theological interpreters need not deny ‘softer’ distinctions here that are seen to operate together in dialogical relationship and inter-dependence; what they reject is a kind of modernist prioritization of detached, impersonal methods of engaging the text as a ‘thing,’ akin to the methodological naturalism proper to the physical sciences. The latter, while appropriate given the subject matter (physical reality, broken down into distinct parts and studied according to their proximate causal relations), is unbecoming of the subject matter of Christian interpretation (the personal Word-address of the transcendent, Triune God, self-disclosed as Father, Son, and Spirit via the biblical witness and the interpretive traditions of the church).

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scholarship.¹⁷ Theological interpreters engage intentionally as whole persons situated in their contexts before God, who read Scripture with explicitly theological commitments and aims, guided by the rule of faith, in communion with the church past and present, in order to encounter God and be formed by that encounter, as it is mediated by the text and guided by the active presence and working of the Holy Spirit.

In *Creation and Fall*, Bonhoeffer exemplifies many of the tenets of theological interpretation.¹⁸ First, he understands his reading of the Bible to be an explicitly and inherently theological practice. This means that Bonhoeffer reads unapologetically as a Christian and as a theologian seeking after God's Word in the words of the text.¹⁹ Repeatedly in *Creation and Fall*, Bonhoeffer speaks of the Bible as an address to God's people, and not simply one taking place in the past but an address that also speaks to readers and hearers today.²⁰ This is because God indwells the text, and we readers and listeners imaginatively find ourselves in the text too, drawn into its world and concerns and called to account.²¹ Moreover, Bonhoeffer finds Christian doctrine to be a useful aid in interpreting the text.²² For example, in his reading of Gen 1–3, Bon-

17. I refer here to the consequences for biblical scholarship following Johann Gabler's distinction of biblical scholarship (doing exegesis as a purely descriptive task) and theology (a prescriptive task involving reflection, synthesis, and application to contemporary concerns) as well as Krister Stendahl's famous differentiation of 'what a text meant' (the task of biblical scholarship) and 'what a text means' (the task of theology). On these developments, see: Gabler, "Oration;" and Hasel, "Relationship." For Watson's critique of Gabler's distinction, see *Text, Church and World*, 30–33, and *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 531–32. Agreeing with Brevard Childs, Watson argues that genuine scriptural interpretation begins from an explicit framework of faith.

18. Which is not to say that he gets everything right. In places, more attention to the contemporary Old Testament scholarship of his day could either improve his exegesis (especially his reading of Gen 1) or augment and lend further support to this own insights and reflections.

19. De Gruchy, "Editor's Introduction," 7.

20. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 29, 30, 43, 82, 83, 89, 100.

21. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 81–82. With respect to Gen 1–3, as we will see later, 'Adam' is *we ourselves* (89, 100), such that we are meant to hear God's address to Adam as if to us.

22. This is another common feature of theological interpretation (though how one construes and "uses" doctrine varies amongst practitioners). As Reno ("Series Preface," 12) writes in his series preface to the Brazos theological commentary, "This

hoeffer draws on christology, the sacraments, ecclesiology, theological anthropology, the resurrection of Christ, and more.²³

Second, Bonhoeffer reads Scripture in light of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer's reading of Scripture is both christocentric and christotelic,²⁴ with Christ as the Centre and goal of Scripture's witness to the self-revelation of God. With respect to Creation, Bonhoeffer notes that we cannot go back to "the beginning" in some pure, unproblematic way. Perhaps with affinities to Gadamer's notion of effective history (that there is no pure 'past' accessible to scholars as some object, only the past as already operative in and partially determinative of the present),²⁵ yet further complicated by the theological problem of sin, Bonhoeffer writes that we find ourselves in the 'middle': "Humankind no longer lives in the beginning; instead it has lost the beginning. Now it finds itself in the middle, knowing neither the end nor the beginning, and yet knowing that it is in the middle."²⁶ Then, perhaps with John 1:1–2 ringing in the background, Bonhoeffer writes, "No one can speak of the beginning but the one who was in the beginning."²⁷ Christ alone, who is God Incarnate comes to us in the midst of time to unveil to us the true beginning and end of human existence: "only from Christ . . . can we know about the original nature of humankind Only in the middle, as those who live from Christ, do we know about the beginning."²⁸ Thus, for example, Bonhoeffer interprets the image of

series of biblical commentaries was born out of the conviction that dogma clarifies rather than obscures." In particular, Reno mentions that contributors are trained in the Nicene tradition, by which he means not merely learning a set of words and creeds but "a pervasive habit of thought" and "the animating culture of the church in its intellectual aspect" (14).

23. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 35–36, 62, 72, 79, 89, 92, 99, 100–101.

24. Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 144–55, 158–59.

25. Ringma, *Gadamer's Dialogical Hermeneutic*, 34.

26. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 28.

27. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 29.

28. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 62. Elsewhere, he writes, "The church . . . views the creation from Christ; or better, in the fallen, old world it believes in the world of the new creation, the new world of the beginning and the end, because it believes in Christ and in nothing else" (22)

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God in Gen. 1 in light of Jesus Christ who is the true Image, the true revelation of God and prototype of the authentically human.²⁹

Third, Bonhoeffer reads the biblical text (here Gen 1–3) canonically, a method that is closely linked with his christological convictions.³⁰ Bonhoeffer is not attempting, naively and simplistically, to read Christ out of the Old Testament exegetically or to read Christ into the Old Testament eisegetically. Rather, Bonhoeffer reads the entire biblical text in its final form as a coherent but diverse and complex whole: “indeed one can read [Genesis] as a book that moves toward Christ *only when one knows* [i.e., from the New Testament] that Christ is the beginning, the new, the end of our whole world” (emphasis added).³¹ This canonical reading leads Bonhoeffer to revive and employ pre-modern methods of reading the text, such as figural reading and typological reading.³²

29. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 65, 113. And linking the two themes, Bonhoeffer writes: “Adam is a human being like us and Adam’s history is our history, with the one decisive difference, to be sure, that for us history begins where for Adam it ends. Our history is history through Christ, whereas Adam’s history is history through the serpent. But precisely as those who live and have their history through Christ alone we are enabled to know about the beginning not by means of our own imagination but only from the new center, from Christ” (92).

30. Specifically, concerning the present text, Bonhoeffer reads the Old Testament in light of the New Testament and especially in light of Jesus Christ. In Bonhoeffer’s work, this commitment to canonical reading centred in Christ leads him both to interpret the OT in light of the NT, but also the NT in light of the OT. In fact, as Bonhoeffer’s theology matured, he came increasingly to see how important the OT is to understanding the true nature of Christianity. For example, “Does the question about saving one’s soul appear in the Old Testament at all? Aren’t righteousness and the Kingdom of God on earth the focus of everything, and isn’t it true that Rom 3.24ff. is not an individualistic doctrine of salvation, but the culmination of the view that God alone is righteous? It is not with the beyond that we are concerned, but with this world as created and preserved, subjected to laws, reconciled, and restored. What is above this world is, in the gospel, intended to exist *for* this world; I mean that, not in the anthropocentric sense of liberal, mystic pietistic, ethical theology, but in the biblical sense of the creation and of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ,” 285–286. Or, “While you’re in Italy I shall write to you about the Song of Songs. I must say I should prefer to read it as an ordinary love song, and that is probably the best ‘Christological’ exposition,” 315.

31. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 22. Or, regarding one of his interpretive decisions later in the book: “To be sure, this judgement . . . arises only from listening to and understanding scripture as a whole,” 71.

32. For example, reminiscent of Irenaeus, Bonhoeffer draws the following connection between Eve and Mary: “Eve, the fallen, wise mother of humankind – that

Fourth, Bonhoeffer grants primacy to the church, not the academy, as the proper locus for reading and interpreting Scripture. He writes, “Theological exposition takes the Bible as the book of the church and interprets it as such.” The church “is founded upon the witness of Holy Scripture”; the “church of Holy Scripture” thus “reads the whole of Holy Scripture as a book of the end, of the new, of Christ.” “*In the church*, therefore, the story of creation must be read in a way that begins with Christ and only then moves on toward him as its goal” (emphasis added).³³ This is not to suggest that the church should be naively ignorant of biblical and theological scholarship; it is simply to affirm that primarily, “Our concern is the text as it presents itself to the church of Christ today.”³⁴

Fifth and finally, Bonhoeffer approaches biblical interpretation as an ethical task. Bible reading aims at the formation of the reader through one’s encounter with God as one seeks to indwell the text; and, one’s ethical formation—one’s character formed in Christ and one’s characteristic love for God and neighbour—inevitably shapes one’s reading of Scripture (one’s heart and character partially predetermines what one cares about, and thus, what one sees and attends to). Moreover, Bible reading is teleologically oriented toward practice; in other words, genuine interpretation of the text (according to the text’s theological nature as God’s Word-address to us) includes the embodiment of its narrative and teachings in the lives of Christian believers, both individually and corporately (e.g., Matt 7:24–27; Jas 1:22–25). As Erich Klaproth recalls from Bonhoeffer’s opening words to his course on Creation and Fall on Nov. 8, 1932, “One can never hear it, if one does not at the same time live it—and this involves specially *exercitium* [‘practice’].”³⁵ The interpreter’s heart and formation, context and concerns, loom large yet subtle (beneath the surface) in *Creation and Fall*. Readers of the book do well to be mindful of Bonhoeffer’s historical,

is the one beginning. Mary, the innocent, unknowing, mother of God – that is the second beginning,” *Creation and Fall*, 138.

33. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 22.

34. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 83.

35. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 23n11.

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cultural, and political context (1932–33 Germany). As John de Gruchy helpfully reminds us:

It was a winter of profound discontent in Germany; it was also a time of confusion, anxiety, and for many, false hope, as social and political upheavals led to the demise of the Weimar Republic and the birth of the Third Reich. In the midst of these events Bonhoeffer called his students to focus their attention on the word of God as the word of truth in a time of turmoil.³⁶

These words are important to keep in mind as we turn now to unpacking Bonhoeffer's theology of personhood and community in *Creation and Fall*.

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According to Bonhoeffer, human beings were created to find meaning, fulfilment, and completion not in themselves, but in God. The human being, like all other creatures, is a contingent lifeform, one dependent upon God for everything that it is and has, as well as for its ongoing existing and becoming. Genuine human community arises within this reality. Genuine human community is not a creation of humanity. It is not, as Bonhoeffer puts it in a later work, a human ideal that we must achieve, but a divine reality that God establishes and into which God calls and draws us to participate.³⁷ Our original participation, as depicted in Gen 2 in the story of the first humans living together in the Garden of Eden, was not itself the fullness and completion of all that God intended human personhood and community ultimately to become. Rather, the original human community depicted in the early chapters of Genesis foreshadows what would be achieved in fullness later, through Christ and in the Spirit. It is Christ, not Adam, who is the true prototype for human beings;³⁸ and it is through Christ in the Spirit that Adam's *telos* is fully revealed, his nature consummated, and his destiny secured.

36. De Gruchy, "Editor's Introduction," 1.

37. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 35–38. See also *Sanctorum Communio*, 125, 153, 157–61, 198–99, 211, 275–282.

38. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 65.

Bonhoeffer's reflections about human personhood and community in *Creation and Fall* flow from his interpretation of the two trees located at the centre of the Garden of Eden. The centrality of the two trees in this setting strikes Bonhoeffer as being deeply significant. Bonhoeffer sees both trees as occupying the focal point of all life, goodness, meaning, knowledge, wisdom, and social harmony. As such, the trees represent God, because they occupy the space and perform the functions that belong properly to God alone.³⁹ "The life that comes from God is at the center; that is to say, God, who gives life, is at the center. . . . Adam's life comes from the center which is not Adam but God; it revolves around this center constantly, without ever trying to take possession of this center of existence."⁴⁰ God alone has Life, in the sense of non-contingent, necessary, self-sustaining, eternal life.⁴¹ Human beings do not of themselves possess this kind of life; theirs is contingent, non-necessary, temporary life, dependent outside of itself for sustenance. As creatures made of the dust of the earth, the original humans are depicted as mortal beings, dependent upon God for their very life and breath.⁴² As David Kelsey says in his magisterial work on theological anthropology, human beings *live on borrowed breath*.⁴³ Genuine, authentic human existence recognizes this existential fact. God is the Source and Centre of human life, meaning, and fulfilment. "Human

39. Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the two trees in the Garden of Eden strikes me as being deeply consonant with Gus Konkel's reading of the text (through, of course, as an Old Testament scholar, Konkel would add layers of historical and exegetical detail not present in Bonhoeffer's reading). In a personal email correspondence, written to me on October 25, 2017, Gus explained: "[The] [t]ree of knowledge and tree of life are both representative of that which is exclusive to the holy (they could of course be real trees, just like bread and wine at communion are real bread and wine). That is holy in the absolute sense, that which defines God. Life on earth is continuously dependent on God, it is the gift of the holy to the common. Knowledge of that life is also exclusive to the source. This is defined by the terms 'good and evil.' This is a common Hebrew merism that can be found everywhere (e.g. Gen 31:24). All knowledge belongs to God alone."

40. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 84.

41. In his *Systematic Theology*, Millard Erickson points out that, properly speaking, Life is a divine attribute (297–98).

42. Walton, "Reading Genesis," 166.

43. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence* (Part One).

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beings have life from God and *before* God.”⁴⁴ Authentic human existence accepts this as unproblematic. “Indeed this tree first gains its particular significance only after humankind has fallen prey to death by eating from the tree of knowledge. Before that, life is not something problematic or to be sought after or snatched at; instead it is just here, as a given life, indeed life before God.”⁴⁵ Adam and Eve are not alone in their being creatures that derive their life and *telos* from God; but as *human beings* made in God’s image they do this in unique and distinctive ways: by the Word-address of God, human beings are enabled to respond to God intelligibly and responsibly as those who converse with God, love God, and serve God through their vocation as stewards of creation. With God as their Centre, and with their lives oriented toward and given meaning and guidance in light of that Centre, they are predisposed to obeying God ‘naturally’ as a characteristic outflow of their being. “Adam has life in the unity of unbroken obedience to the Creator—has life just because Adam lives from the center of life, and is oriented toward the center of life, without placing Adam’s own life at the center.”⁴⁶ Adam lives this life of obedience in a truly authentic way, in innocence flowing from freedom to be that which his Creator calls him to be. Adam and Eve possess this life “in their obedience, in their innocence, in their ignorance; that is, they possess it in their freedom. The life that human beings have happens in an obedience that issues from freedom.”⁴⁷

In this context of wholeness, freedom, and innocence (one might say, “purity of heart,” i.e., Matt 5:8), Adam and Eve enjoy perfect community with God and each other. At this point in the story, there is not a hint of pride, fear, distrust, envy, distorted desire or lust, competitiveness, inequality, selfishness, or dissatisfaction within or between humans. Adam receives Eve as pure gift and loves her as such:

44. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 84.

45. Kierkegaard says that authentic Christian life is found not by grasping at it or by losing one’s sense of self by falling into passivity (both of these are forms of despair), but when the self “rests transparently in the power that established it,” Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 44.

46. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 84.

47. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 84.

That Eve is derived from Adam is a cause not for pride, but for particular gratitude, with Adam. Adam does not infer from it any claim for himself; instead Adam knows that he is bound in a wholly new way to this Eve who is derived from him. This bond is best described in the expression: he now belongs to her, because she belongs to him. They are now no longer without each other; they are one and yet two. . . . But this becoming one never means the merging of the two or the abolition of their creatureliness as individuals. It actualizes to the highest possible degree their belonging to each other, which is based precisely on their being different from each other.⁴⁸

Eve represents grace to Adam in a way more fundamental to his humanness than just being a relational partner (important as that is); she is a concrete, embodied manifestation of Adam's limit. "The other person is the limit that God sets for me, the limit that I love and that I will not transgress because of my love. . . . By the creation of the other person freedom and creatureliness are bound together in love."⁴⁹ One could say that the other person is a sacrament, a physical manifestation of an invisible grace (the grace of transcendence of self through communion with the other) and thus an instrument of divine grace and love, though Bonhoeffer himself does not use this language. Adam and Eve are thus truly *free*—not 'free' in the modern sense of the (almost absolute) autonomy of the individual, i.e., freedom *from* God and other people. They are truly free *for God* and free *for one another*. "For in the language of the Bible freedom is not something that people have for themselves but something they have for others."⁵⁰ For Bonhoeffer, freedom is not primarily a quality, an ability, or a possession; it is a relation

48. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 97–98.

49. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 99. In *Santorum Communio*, 45–55, Bonhoeffer had employed this concept to explain that human beings encounter in both God and other human beings' ethical limits on their own existence. Thus, their own subjectivity is conditioned and limited by the subjectivity of other persons who confront them from outside of themselves. Bonhoeffer's views here on personhood share some affinities with the views of Buber and Levinas. For a discussion of the differences between Bonhoeffer and Levinas, see Zimmerman, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*, 278–81, 285; and between Bonhoeffer and Buber, see Green, "Human Sociality and Christian Community," 116.

50. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 62.

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between persons. “Being free means ‘being-free-for-the-other,’ because I am bound to the other. Only by being in relation with the other am I free.”⁵¹ Such freedom is an image of God’s own freedom.⁵² Bonhoeffer writes, “God wills not to be free for God’s self but for humankind. Because God in Christ is free for humankind, because God does not keep God’s freedom to God’s self, we can think of freedom only as a ‘being free for. . .’”⁵³ Humans were created to be *exocentric* creatures, beings that find their centre and completion outside of themselves, in God and in other human persons.⁵⁴

This idyllic picture is complicated by the presence of the other tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To grasp what Bonhoeffer says about this tree, it is important to understand that Bonhoeffer does not regard the events recorded in Gen 2–3 as being historical; he is not troubled by this or by questions related to the historicity of the stories.⁵⁵ His interpretation is more existential—or better, *theological*—

51. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 63.

52. Green, “Human Sociality and Christian Community,” 117. The classic treatment of Bonhoeffer’s theology of human sociality is Green’s *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*.

53. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 63. Bonhoeffer famously expounds the concept of *imago Dei* in terms of humans being free-for-God and free-for-others, i.e., he interprets the *imago* relationally (Barth follows Bonhoeffer on this in his *Church Dogmatics* 3/1). However, Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of the *imago Dei* is not restricted to this. Primarily, being in God’s image means *representing God*, and one of the ways in which humans represent God is by their being-in-relation in genuine love and freedom. Another important way that humans represent God is by ruling over creation, having been commissioned and empowered by God to do so and accountable to God in this function, 65–66.

54. The term *exocentric* comes from Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 43–79.

55. For example, Bonhoeffer writes, “Whether the creation occurred in rhythms of millions of years or in single days, this does no damage to biblical thinking. We have no reason to assert the latter or to doubt the former; the question as such does not concern us. That the biblical author, to the extent that the author’s word is a human word, was bound by the author’s own time, knowledge, and limits is as little disputed as the fact that through this word God, and God alone, tells us about God’s creation.” Later, when discussing God’s fashioning the human out of clay, Bonhoeffer writes, “Surely no one can gain any knowledge about the origin of humankind from this! To be sure, as an account of what happened this story is at first sight of just as little consequence, and just as full of meaning, as many another myth of creation. And yet in being distinguished as the word of God it is quite simply *the*

in nature.⁵⁶ He is concerned with how the text addresses *us* (for him, those who read and heard the text in 1932–33 Germany).⁵⁷ Adam is *we ourselves*.⁵⁸ When the text describes Adam, it is describing us; when it is addressing, judging, and holding forth grace to Adam, it is doing all of this to us.⁵⁹ The picture of genuine human community depicted in Gen 2 “is the church [Kirche] in its original form” and “in its deepest sense the community of husband and wife [depicted in Gen. 2] . . . is destined to be the church (Eph 5:30–32).”⁶⁰ That Genesis speaks to us in pictures is not an indication of its limitations, but of its great depths:

Who can speak of these things except in pictures? Pictures after all are not lies; rather they indicate things and enable the underlying meaning to shine through. To be sure, pictures do vary; the pictures of a child differ from those of an adult, and those of a person from the desert differ from those of a person from the city. One way or another, however, they remain true, to the extent that human speech and even speech about

source of knowledge about the origin of humankind” (Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 49, 75–76, original emphasis).

56. Bonhoeffer is not seeking, in modernist fashion, to separate the kerygmatic kernel of universal truth from the cultural shell of its ancient, primitive form. Rather, it is precisely through its form, in the actual stories that we have, that God’s theological Word of address comes to us as readers. Later, in the prison letters, Bonhoeffer distances himself from Bultmann’s existential demythologization on this point: “You can’t, as Bultmann supposes, separate God and miracle, but you must be able to interpret and proclaim *both* in a ‘non-religious’ sense. Bultmann’s approach is fundamentally still a liberal one (i.e. abridging the gospel), whereas I’m trying to think theologically,” Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 285.

57. He writes, “This is God’s word; this is an event at the beginning of history, before history, beyond history, and yet in history; this is a decision that affects the world; *we ourselves* are the ones who are affected, are intended, are addressed, accused, condemned, expelled; *God, yes God*, is the one who blesses and curses; it is our primeval history [Urgeschichte], truly our own, every individual person’s beginning, destiny, guilt, and end – so says the church of Christ,” Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 82, original emphasis.

58. Though he might nuance this a little differently, Gus Konkel similarly places an emphasis on the text’s significance for the people of God in the present: “As I always tell my students, Gen 1–11 is not to tell us about some world in the past, it is to explain to us the world of the present” (email correspondence, October 25, 2017).

59. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 89, 100.

60. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 100, 101.

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abstract ideas can remain true at all—that is, to the extent that God dwells in them.⁶¹

While the tree of life points to the source, and thus the fullness and richness, of life with and before God, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil points to the limit or boundary of human existence. This boundary is Adam/humanity's creatureliness. Adam does not initially regard this tree as a temptation, but recognizes it as "the grace that belongs to his creatureliness and freedom."⁶² Adam is not God; he was created to be *like God*, made in God's own image, but not to *be God*, or to be like God in such a way that he *takes or usurps God's proper place*.⁶³ He is to be like God, in dependency upon and obedience to God. Adam's contingent "I exist" is properly derivative of God's absolute "I AM." To many who read the story of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for the first time, God's prohibition against eating of it seems arbitrary (why the silly test?), duplicitous (doesn't the New Testament, e.g., Jas 1:13–15, say that God tempts no one?), or even fearful and defensive (is God afraid of what the humans are becoming in Gen 3:22?). Taking Gen 2–3 as a literal, historical account raises these and other troubling questions.⁶⁴ But Bonhoeffer does not read it this way; what

61. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 81.

62. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 87. Moreover, "Adam knows neither what good nor what evil is and lives in the strictest sense *beyond good and evil*; that is, Adam lives out of the tree of life that comes from God," 87–88, original emphasis.

63. Wenham and several other interpreters (he cites Cassuto, Westermann, Vawter, and Clark) regard the tree as being associated with wisdom, not wisdom generally but specifically wisdom that belongs properly to God. He notes that "the wisdom literature . . . makes it plain that there is a wisdom that is God's sole preserve, which man should not aspire to attain (e.g., Job 15:7–9, 40; Prov 30:1–4), since a full understanding of God, the universe, and man's place in it is ultimately beyond human comprehension. To pursue it without reference to revelation is to assert human autonomy, and to neglect the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7)," 63. Wenham notes that this interpretation is likely confirmed by Ezek 28:6, 15–17, which he sees as the closest parallel to Gen 2–3, where the king of Tyre is expelled from Eden for excessive pride, regarding himself "wise as a god," 64.

64. Thus, I find solutions such as that proposed by Walton to be theologically unconvincing: "God's prohibition of the tree need not lead us to conclude that there was something wrong with what the tree gave (remember, everything was created "good"). Rather than God's putting the tree there simply to test Adam and Eve, it is more in keeping with his character to understand that the tree would have use in the future. When the time was right, the first couple would be able to eat from it"

he finds important is the theological meaning of what the text depicts “in pictures”: “The prohibition means nothing other than this: Adam, you are who you are because of me, your Creator; so now be what you are. You are a free creature, so now be that. You are free, so be free; you are a creature, so be a creature.”⁶⁵ For Bonhoeffer, then, the early chapters of Genesis reveal that God intends human persons to be creatures that love God and one another genuinely and freely. Thus, centred and oriented outside of themselves, toward God and one another, they find meaning, purpose, significance, flourishing, and harmony.

DESTRUCTION OF HUMAN COMMUNITY

When Adam and Eve eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Gen 3, they do more than simply disobey God’s command and incur guilt. They *do* act in disobedience and so incur guilt, but much more fundamentally they betray their own nature *as creatures* and *as human beings made in God’s image*. The significance of their eating of the tree goes beyond the act itself. According to Bonhoeffer, the story symbolizes the fundamental problem of human existence: that human beings do not acknowledge God as the Source and Centre of their existence, but instead attempt to usurp God’s place as Centre and be gods unto themselves in place of God.⁶⁶ Human beings want to be

(Walton, *NIVAC: Genesis*, 205). This interpretation seems to me to be constrained by an overly literalistic and historicist reading, i.e., that the tree was an actual tree in real historical time.

65. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 85.

66. Gus Konkel corroborated this interpretation for me when he wrote (email correspondence, October 25, 2017): “Of course the tempter readily deceives arrogant humans—they can be god. So they think. Partaking of the tree of knowledge describes humanity, not simply some event in the past. Modernists partook vigorously from that tree, believing there is nothing to be known outside of what their minds can think or perceive. (As Conrad Black puts it, “faith in the non-existence of anything greater than themselves.) It is the claim made since Adam and Eve. . . . An implication of claiming to have all knowledge is the claim to know what is good and what is evil. . . . Only if you have all knowledge is this possible. The whole book of Genesis is about this experiment. The narrator has very deliberately drawn the whole to a conclusion in the words of Joseph in Gen 50:19–20: ‘Am I in the place of God?’ Rhetorical question to the brothers. ‘You intended this for evil but God intended it for good so as it is this day a great people is preserved alive.’ The claim to be god, the claim to all knowledge failed, and of course it also resulted in severance from

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their own source of life, their own source of meaning and purpose, and they want to decide for themselves what is good and what is evil.⁶⁷ They “renounce the life that comes from [the word of God] and grab it for themselves.”⁶⁸ The result? By “eating of the tree,” humankind now stands in the centre, having no limit and living from its own resources. But to do so is to destroy their very creatureliness and to introduce a rupture into their nature (of all creatures, only humans negate their own nature; their good and evil acts result from this rupture in their being). Bonhoeffer writes,

Humankind lives in a circle; it *lives* out of its own resources; it is alone. Yet *it cannot live*, because in fact it does not live but in this life is dead, because it *must* live, that is, it *must* accomplish life out of its own resources and just that is its death (as the basis at once of its knowledge and of its existence!). Humankind whom God’s commandment confronts with a demand is thrown back upon itself and now has to live in this way. Humankind now lives only out of its own resources, by its knowledge of good and evil and thus is dead.⁶⁹

Norman Wirzba explains, “Bonhoeffer proposes that prior to the transgression Adam lives in respectful obedience to the grace of life. His obedience made possible a unified, singularly focused form of life in which the two-sidedness of good and evil . . . had not yet emerged.” Further, “The option is not between good and evil but between a ‘life obedient to God’ and ‘a life of good and evil.’”⁷⁰ The latter path can only

the tree of life. But the punishment is mitigated. *Eve* (*khawwah* = life) is the means of preserving life in the present (Gen 3:20). But Genesis is the story of the blessing all nations may participate in (Gen 12:3), the working out of which is expressed by Joseph in the blessing of Jacob (Israel) as seen at the end of the book of Genesis.”

67. Later, Bonhoeffer picks up this theme of human beings, as autonomous individuals, desiring to be their own source of the knowledge of good and evil in his *Ethics* (written 1940–1943; first German edition published posthumously in 1949; first English edition published in 1955). There he argues that Christian ethics primarily concerns our being formed in Christ, not as making use of *our* knowledge of good and evil, our “knowing good and evil in disunion with the origin,” as Bonhoeffer puts it, *Ethics*, 308.

68. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 117.

69. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 91, original emphasis.

70. Wirzba, “The Art of Creaturely Life,” 14n14.

lead to death, or as Wirzba describes Bonhoeffer's interpretation, to "deathly 'life.'"⁷¹

Not content to be the image of their Creator (*imago Dei*), human beings fall prey to the serpent's suggestion that they can be *more* like their Creator (*sicut Deus*) by transgressing their creaturely limit. The temptation is subtle, even 'pious,'⁷² because it begins with the truth (i.e., that human beings *are* to be like God) and plays off of that truth by re-directing and thus distorting it. "This is disobedience in the semblance of obedience, the desire to rule in the semblance of service, the will to be creator in the semblance of being a creature, the dead in the semblance of life."⁷³ Bonhoeffer teases out the differences with the use of two Latin descriptors, *imago Dei* and *sicut Deus*:

Imago dei—humankind in the image of God in being for God and the neighbour, in its original creatureliness and limitedness; sicut deus—humankind similar to God in knowing-out-of-its-own-self about good and evil, in having no limit and acting-out-of-its-own-resources, in its aseity, in its being alone. Imago dei—bound to the word of the Creator and deriving life from the Creator; sicut deus—bound to the depths of its own knowledge of God, of good and evil. Imago dei—the creature living in the unity of obedience; sicut deus—the creator-human-being who lives on the basis of the divide [Zwiespalt] between good and evil. Imago dei, sicut deus, agnus dei—the human being who is God incarnate, who was

71. Wirzba says that such deathly life is both dishonest and damaging: "It is dishonest because it denies that we daily depend on others and upon God for life. It is damaging because it transforms a world of grace into an arena of competitive grasping and self-glorifying manipulation," Wirzba, "The Art of Creaturely Life," 14.

72. By appealing to God's own word, but distorting it, the serpent attacks not with flagrant malice but under the garb of religious piety and profundity: "In this way the serpent purports somehow to know about the depths of the true God beyond this given word of God. . . . The serpent knows of a more exalted God, a nobler God, who has no need to make such a prohibition" (Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 106). Bonhoeffer sees a lesson in this for Christians in his own time: "Were the question to come to us with its godlessness unveiled and laid bare, we would be able to resist it. But Christians are not open to attack in that way; one must actually approach them with God, one must show them a better, a prouder, God than they seem to have, if they are to fall," 107.

73. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 117.

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sacrificed for humankind sicut deus, in true divinity slaying
its false divinity and restoring the imago dei.⁷⁴

The human being that has made itself to be the ultimate centre of its own existence has become alienated from God and other humans; such a person is profoundly alone. Both God and other persons become threats to one's centrality, one's personal sovereignty, one's will to power as Nietzsche puts it (because once God is 'dead' the sheer will to power takes over and human beings can live 'beyond good and evil' in a sense vastly different from Bonhoeffer's notion of pre-fallen innocence of good and evil).⁷⁵ Now the human being regards the natural limit or boundary that God had set as being arbitrary, patronizing, or even malevolent. "Now he no longer accepts the limit as God the Creator's grace; instead he hates it as God begrudging him something as Creator."⁷⁶ Adam can no longer trust God; he has become disoriented, distorted, and divided—relationally, volitionally, epistemologically,⁷⁷ psychologically, and bodily. As a corollary of this, Adam can no longer trust Eve, the 'other' that God has given him, since "in the same act of transgressing the boundary he has transgressed the limit that the other person represented to him in bodily form. Now he no longer sees the limit that the other person constitutes as grace but as God's wrath, God's hatred, God's begrudging."⁷⁸ Now, instead

74. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 113.

75. See footnote 62 above.

76. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 122.

77. Bonhoeffer writes about the epistemological consequences of this state (the mind turned in upon itself) in *Act and Being*, 45, 137, in *Ethics* (e.g., 299–304), and in his Christology lectures (on the latter, see Franklin, "Bonhoeffer's Anti-Logos"). An important passage connecting this theme in *Creation and Fall* back to Bonhoeffer's earlier *Act and Being* reads as follows: "For 'in Adam' means to be in untruth, in culpable perversion of the will, that is, of human essence. It means to be turned inward into one's self, *cor curvum in se*. Human beings have torn themselves loose from community with God and, therefore, also from that with other human beings, and now they stand alone, that is, in untruth. Because human beings are alone, the world is 'their' world, and other human beings have sunk into the world of things (cf. Heidegger's 'Mitsein,' 'being-with'). God has become a religious object, and human beings themselves have become their own creator and lord, belonging to themselves," *Act and Being*, 137.

78. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 122.

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of existing in freedom-for-God-and-each-other, human beings exist radically for-self, as “one person sees the other in terms of their being over against each other; each sees the other as divided from himself or herself.”⁷⁹ ‘Freedom’ has now become freedom *for*-self and freedom-*from*-God-and-other-persons.

Elsewhere, Bonhoeffer describes this state by appealing to Luther’s notion of the *cor curvum in se* (the heart turned or curved in upon itself). Rejecting their God-ordained creaturely limit, which inherently oriented them toward finding their Centre and completion outside of themselves, human beings have become radically self-centred, or “wrongly centred” as Miroslav Volf puts it.⁸⁰ Ironically, in finding themselves in this way, they lose themselves. They become ‘lost,’ alienated from God, from others, and from themselves. They exist in a state of living death,⁸¹ contradiction,⁸² despair (Kierkegaard), and restlessness (Augustine), unable truly to know God and themselves (Calvin), unable genuinely to love God and others as they should (Wesley⁸³). They are compelled to live, defining and striving after their own self-appointed *telos*,⁸⁴ but unable truly to live and flourish as God intended since gaining this life lies beyond their own power and even comprehension (e.g., Matt 15:24–26; John 12:24–26). Human beings are now ‘cursed’ to live in the

79. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 122.

80. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 69. See also Pannenberg’s discussion of sin as ‘centrality’ in *Anthropology*, 80–153.

81. Bonhoeffer’s description is profound: “For what causes despair in Adam’s situation is just this, that Adam lives out of Adam’s own resources, is imprisoned within Adam, and thus can want only Adam, can hanker only after Adam; for Adam has indeed become Adam’s own god, the creator of Adam’s own life. When Adam seeks God, when Adam seeks life, Adam seeks only Adam. On the other hand it is just this solitude, this resting in oneself, this existing in and of oneself, that plunges Adam into an infinite thirst. It is therefore a desperate, an unquenchable, and eternal thirst that Adam feels for life. It is essentially a thirst for death; the more passionately Adam seeks after life, the more completely he is ensnared in death.” *Creation and Fall*, 143.

82. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 92.

83. See Shepherd, “. . . That We May Perfectly Love Thee: John Wesley and Sanctification.”

84. “And those who have attained the knowledge of good and evil, who live as people who are split apart within themselves [im Zwiespalt], have lost their life.” Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 89.

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world they have chosen: “The curse is the Creator’s affirmation of the world that has been destroyed. That humankind must live in the fallen world, that humankind gets what it wants, that as the being who is *sicut deus* it must live in its *sicut deus* world—that is the *curse*.”⁸⁵ Having rejected their true Centre and Source of genuine community, human beings struggle to live together and to love one another; they strive to achieve their own ideals and visions of community.⁸⁶ They long for love, belonging, affirmation, acceptance, harmony, and a sense of social utility (i.e., a sense that they contribute something unique and needed to their communities). However, their deepest longings and aspirations are always beyond their grasp, beset by human ego, pride, distorted and obsessive desires, envy, defensiveness, greed, corruption, laziness, lack of empathy, idolatry, ethnocentricity, ideology, and the consequences of socio-economic, racial, and gender inequality (to name just a handful of issues). Just as the true Source and Centre of human community lies transcendentally beyond human beings (in God, the Creator), so too the redemption, reconciliation, restoration, and realignment of human community must come from beyond the confines of human will, achievement, authority, and power.

RESTORATION OF COMMUNITY

Since *Creation and Fall* focuses on giving a theological exposition of Gen 1–3, it can only hint at and foreshadow what the restoration of human community requires and involves. First, the restored human community is centred in God, more precisely—in *Christ*. Christ is our *new* Centre, the one who restores and completes our genuine creatureliness and frees us from our own ‘knowledge of good and evil.’ It is in Christ that our lives are preserved and in whom we find our *telos* or end. It is

85. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 132, original emphasis.

86. For an analysis and critique of non-theological attempts to ground personhood and community, see Franklin, *Being Human, Being Church*, chapters 1–2, where I explicate and evaluate six types: a) a social contract between consenting individuals (Locke, Hobbes); b) a moral association of cause and duty (Kant); c) erotic communities of desire and self-assertion (Nietzsche); d) phileic communities of common interest and expression (Sartre; existentialism); e) community as an instrumental good for its members (sociobiology/evolutionary psychology); and f) community as concentric circles of care (Noddings).

through Christ that we learn about our true beginning and true nature, through whom also we are reoriented toward the new creation, and in whom we find ourselves addressed from the centre of our existence (as, indeed, Christ is the Centre of all human life and history).⁸⁷ It is in Christ that we learn what it means to be creatures made in God's image.⁸⁸ Even our bodies find their completion and transformation in and through Christ: "The body and blood of the Lord's Supper are the new realities of creation promised to fallen Adam. Because Adam is created as body, Adam is also redeemed as body [and God comes to Adam as body], in Jesus Christ and in the sacrament."⁸⁹ Christ stands at the centre of restored human community as Mediator and Priest. As Bonhoeffer writes in *Life Together*, "Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate."⁹⁰ For, "Only in Jesus Christ are we one; only through him are we bound together. He remains the one and only mediator throughout eternity."⁹¹

Second, the restoration and completion of genuine human community in Christ requires redemption from our own captivity to self, a reversal of the *cor curvum in se*. Through Christ and in the Spirit, God comes to set us free to be truly *for God*, truly *for others* and *for the world*.⁹² It is in Christ and in the Spirit that we are enabled to love God, love neighbour, and even love ourselves (our true selves, not our

87. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 29, 34–35, 62, 65, 92–93, 140. For Bonhoeffer's explication of Christ as the Centre of human history, see his "Lectures on Christology," 324–27.

88. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 65, 113.

89. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 79.

90. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 38. Bonhoeffer had written much earlier in his doctoral dissertation: "It is extremely dangerous to confuse community romanticism [Gemeinschaftsromantik] with the community of saints [Gemeinschaft der Heiligen]. For the latter must always be acknowledged as something that is already established by God. The community of saints is, of course, something we ourselves must will. But it can be willed by us only once God wills it through us" *Sanctorum Communio*, 278.

91. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 33.

92. Volf writes that our new centre in Christ is a de-centred centre. He helpfully highlights the Spirit's role in achieving this: "The Spirit enters the citadel of the self, decenters the self by fashioning it in the image of the self-giving Christ, and frees its will . . ." Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 92.

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imagined or ideal selves). For example, “God does not want me to mold others into the image that seems good to me, that is, into my own image. Instead, in their freedom from me God made other people in God’s own image. . . . God creates every person in the image of God’s Son, the Crucified”⁹³ Thus, it is in and through Christ and by the Spirit that we can fulfill our calling and function as persons made in the divine image and patterned after Christ the prototype, the “man for others” who shows us that genuine Christian life entails “existence for others.”⁹⁴ This being-for-others informs both the content and shape of Christian witness; it is central to what the church *is* in Christ and what the church is called to embody and proclaim in the world as it bears witness.⁹⁵ For Bonhoeffer, the church is *only* the church when it exists for-others, since Christ is Saviour in virtue of his being fully God and fully human, and thus his being fully *for*-God and *for*-human-beings.

Third, it is important to point out that the church as the “new humanity” bears witness to the eschatological, new creation community in a real yet proleptic way, as a sign and foretaste of the coming kingdom of God. Bonhoeffer writes, “the church of Jesus Christ is the place—that is, the space—in the world where the reign of Jesus Christ over the whole world is to be demonstrated and proclaimed.”⁹⁶ Its witness points to something real, but as a sign sharing in the reality to which it points, not as the ultimate fulfillment of that reality itself (the church is a *penultimate* participation in this *ultimate* eschatological reality).⁹⁷ Thus, a fellow Christian is “a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God.”⁹⁸ In this sense, the church itself and especially the Christian community is sacramental in nature, pointing beyond itself to the true source and destiny of the relational nature of human beings, namely the Father-Son-Spirit Life of the triune God. This highlights the inherently social nature of Christian soteriology: being saved includes (as part of its intrinsic *telos*) being in community,

93. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 95.

94. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 381–82.

95. See Franklin, “Bonhoeffer’s Missional Ecclesiology,” 115–17.

96. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 63.

97. For Bonhoeffer’s discussion of ultimate and penultimate, see *Ethics*, 146–70.

98. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 29.

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which means being in the church. As Bonhoeffer writes, “Whoever seeks to become a new human being individually cannot succeed. To become a new human being means to come into the church, to become a member of Christ’s body.”⁹⁹

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bonhoeffer’s theology of personhood and community focuses on being reconciled, restored, renewed, and re-oriented—in short, *centred*—in Christ. This is insightful and important, but also incomplete. More needs to be said to articulate a fully trinitarian and participatory ecclesiology that biblical faith and classical theology demand. I propose that such an ecclesiology would include a theological explication of God’s sending forth of the Holy Spirit to indwell (be *in*) those whom Christ has redeemed, thereby placing them *in* Christ who *is* in the Father.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, it would draw this biblical pattern into a robust theology of participation, in dialogue with patristic and medieval sources.¹⁰¹ Bonhoeffer hints in this direction when he writes: “The church of Christ is Christ present through the Holy Spirit. . . . The life of believers in the church-community is truly the life of Jesus Christ in them (Gal 2:20; Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:5; 1 John 4:15).”¹⁰² However, Bonhoeffer never had the opportunity to develop this insight theologically into a fuller trinitarian model.¹⁰³

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99. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 219.

100. Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, 176; Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel*.

101. See, for example, Dennis Ngien’s *Gifted Response*. See also my article, “The God Who Sends is The God Who Loves.”

102. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 221.

103. I began to sketch out a trinitarian, participatory account of human personhood and community in my *Being Human, Being Church*, chapters 3 and 6.

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