The Legacy of Anti-Judaism in the Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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While Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of the few Christian leaders in Nazi Germany who advocated for the church to fight against antisemitism,Anker[1] he also supported an anti-Judaic theology built upon Christian supersessionism,Anker[2] the charge of deicide, and the stereotype that Judaism is a legalistic religion. Bonhoeffer's anti-Judaic theology contradicts the integrity of his work against Nazism insofar as Jews are regarded as theologically inferior.

However, a tension arises in the progression of Bonhoeffer's work: as his anti-Judaism diminishes, his insistence on the church's obligation to care for the suffering rises to the forefront. In response to Bonhoeffer's anti- Judaism and Yad Vashem's decision in 2003 to not award Bonhoeffer with the distinction of "Righteous Gentile," Christians have the opportunity to confront the tradition of anti-Judaism that Bonhoeffer's work represents while upholding his ecclesial vision of justice for the oppressed.

The "Jewish Question" and the Christian Legacy of Anti-Judaism

In 1931 Bonhoeffer was ordained in a Germany that faced an increasingly divided church, with Christians from the Nazi-supporting German Evangelical Church taking almost half of the church council in 1932.[3] That year, German Christians published a statement expressing their ecclesial commitment to both race (*Volkstum*) and the German nation as "God-given orders of life" that they were obliged to preserve.[4] They sought an exclusively Aryan-pure church with membership based not on baptism but on "blood and race," believing that such purity would lead to the spiritual and political revival needed by a war-torn and economically depressed Germany.[5] Charles Marsh notes the theological beliefs of the German Christians at this time: they believed that God had brought about a "new Israel" in Germany, that "Jesus Christ had abrogated Israel's ancient covenant," and that "Jesus was not a Jew."[6]

Shortly after the majority of German Christians welcomed Hitler into power as Reich Chancellor, Hitler issued a decree as a result of the burning of the Reichstag building in February 1933, enabling him to circumvent the personal rights of all individuals regardless of ethnicity, religion, or social class.[7] Shortly after, German Evangelical Church leadership held a conference focused on the "Führer principle," "racial conformity," and unifying around the "Reich church."[8] Bonhoeffer did not attend, remaining among only 15% of pastors in Germany who did not profess loyalty to Hitler.[9] April 7, 1933 saw the establishment of the "Aryan paragraph," which limited Jews from most major professions in Germany and also began to segregate Christians of Jewish descent from Christians in the German Evangelical Church.

At this time, Bonhoeffer was a member of the minority Confessing Church movement. The Confessing Church fought against "German Christian domination of institutionalized Protestantism" and National Socialism at large.[10] Bonhoeffer's earliest work reflects his pastoral concerns and effort to support the cause of the Confessing Church in standing up against the German Evangelical Church. Upon writing to Erwin Sutz, Bonhoeffer explains that "the Jewish question has caused the church no end of trouble; here, the most sensible people have lost their

heads and their entire Bible."[11] In this instance, Bonhoeffer fought against the German Christians' "ethnic chauvinism" and antisemitism that marked their movement and allegiance to Nazism.[12]

The Aryan paragraph marks the beginning of Bonhoeffer's most significant and explicit responses to the state's and church's discrimination against the Jews. In his essay, "The Church and the Jewish Question," Bonhoeffer argues that two issues arise regarding the Jewish question: the first addressing how the church should respond to the actions of the state, and the second addressing what the ecclesial consequences will be if Jewish Christians are excluded from ecclesial membership.[13] The Lutheran influence of the "two kingdoms" is apparent in Bonhoeffer's argument that the church should not directly involve itself with the state's actions; rather, "it has to affirm the state as God's order of preservation in this godless world."[14] However, this does not permit the church to remain apathetic to the actions of the state. The church is able and required to constantly ask the state if its actions are justifiable "as *legitimate state* actions, that is, actions that create law and order."[15] The state has the divinely-given responsibility to maintain law and order, but too little or too much of that law and order runs the risk of infringing upon the rights of individuals.

The state is the one who "makes history," according to Bonhoeffer, yet the church has a unique place in history as the community which "alone bears witness to God's *breaking into* history through Christ and lets the state go on making history."[16] This eschatological historymaking is fundamental to Bonhoeffer's conception of the church, because the church—confident in God's plan for eschatological redemption—"sees the old world only in the light of the new world," speaking from "the end of the world as though…the world has already been judged."[17]

Recognizing the tension between the reality of Germany in 1933 and the "eschatological majesty of revelation," Bonhoeffer attempted to help the church remain faithful to its gospelproclamation and reclaim the Bible he was afraid the church had lost.[18] Bonhoeffer saw three options for the church's response: first, to hold the state accountable for its actions; second, to care for those affected by the state's actions; and third, to take "direct political action."[19] This third option is not found in Lutheranism, serving as Bonhoeffer's radical attempt to encourage the church to end the state's persecution of those it has made into victims. Despite the uncommon nature of his third point, Bonhoeffer's reasoning is clear. The first two options reflect his Lutheran upbringing, and the third option expresses Bonhoeffer's conviction that Christians are free in Christ, which necessitates that they be unqualifiedly free to love and serve others.

However, his clearly expressed options for how the church might respond become complicated when he argues that there would be too much law and order from the state if the state excluded Jewish Christians from the church community or put "a ban on missions to the Jews" as German Christians were advocating.[20] To do either would require the church to issue a *status confessionis,* compelling the church to vote on whether or not to take direct political action.[21]

It is appropriate and necessary for Bonhoeffer to find the state's exclusion of converted Jews from the church problematic because the state is not permitted to exclude anyone from the church . It is also noteworthy that he fought against the attempts to end missions to the Jews which German Christians attempted, not because they respected Judaism as a religion, but because they were antisemitic. Bonhoeffer's attempts to protect missions to the Jews seem laudable to the extent that he is preserving what he sees to be an important task of the church. However, he follows by charging the Jews with deicide and finds hope for them only insofar as they will convert to Christ either at the eschaton or by means of Christian persuasion throughout history. He explains the unique, particular relationship Christians have with Jews by recalling that Christians have never ceased to forget that the chosen people committed deicide. For doing so, the Jews "must endure the curse of its action in long-drawn-out-suffering."[22]

By charging the Jews with deicide and claiming suffering as their rightful punishment, a theological contradiction emerges that calls into question the need for any of the three options to be enacted by the church. If the Jews are supposed to bear their suffering, why should the church care for any Jews affected by the actions of the state? Bonhoeffer's theological justification for Jewish suffering contradicts his compassion and concern for the suffering. Because of Bonhoeffer's explicit anti-Judaism,[23] his desire for preservation of the church's mission to the Jews is no longer commendable but problematic in its own respect.

Bonhoeffer's anti-Judaism is furthered by his indebtedness to Martin Luther. Bonhoeffer quotes Luther on the status of the Jews in society: the miserable Jews "are plagued everywhere, and scattered about all countries, having no certain resting place."[24] This misery, this curse, and this suffering will not cease for the Jews whom God once loved until all of Israel is converted. The church's role in relationship to Israel is to convert the Jews, while recognizing that "no state in the world can deal with this enigmatic people, because God has not yet finished with it."[25] One's attempt to solve the "Jewish question"— a problematic phrase in its own right—begins with the despairing reality that the Jewish question has been solved by God's punishment and curse upon them. Bonhoeffer perpetuates his tradition's anti-Judaism, attempting to secure the church's role to convert as many Jews as possible while the rest are to continue suffering under divinely-sanctioned punishment.

Not only is this unnecessary to his overall argument, but it calls into question the genuine love of neighbor that should be the primary motivating factor in Bonhoeffer's attempt to both care for the victims of the state's actions and to reclaim a non-exclusive church. Despite his attempt to compel the church to aid the victims of the state, Bonhoeffer unnecessarily advocates for a strong Christian supersessionism that theologically diminishes his efforts. Victoria Barnett is charitable to Bonhoeffer, arguing that he should be commended for advocating that the church must stop the injustice that was beginning to happen.[26] My contention is that if the church is, in Bonhoeffer's words, to "protest through its proclamation," this anti-Judaic theology inevitably informs the proclamation as well, contributing to—yet still distinct from—a culture that was increasingly against Jews.[27]

Bonhoeffer's response to the "Jewish question" as it relates to ecclesial membership and exclusion furthers the tension between his anti-Judaism and his concern for the church to act rightly and justly in the world. The Aryan paragraph was receiving support from the German Reich church, "erecting a racial law as a prerequisite of Christian communion."[28] Yet to Bonhoeffer, the church could not exclude anyone who had received the baptismal sacrament, especially for the sake of the *Volk*. Bonhoeffer believed that the church was simply "the congregation of those who are called, where the gospel is rightly taught, and the sacraments are rightly administered."[29] Anyone excluded would have their rights lessened, becoming "secondclass Christians."[30] It was imperative, in Bonhoeffer's judgment, to allow Jewish Christians to remain members of the church without qualification; otherwise the church would be in jeopardy of no longer existing as the church.

Bonhoeffer advocated for the church to bravely stand up for its members—not because they were Jews who had converted to Christianity, but because they were Christians gathered together by baptism. The significance of this cannot be overlooked today or in Bonhoeffer's context, for nothing other than the grace of God— even the laws of the state— has relevancy for who can be considered a member of the Christian community. If any person or group is to be excluded, the non-excluded members need to feel the weight of exclusion as well.[31] The solidarity that Bonhoeffer supports is absent from many of his peers, yet this is strictly an ecclesiological defense. While he rejects any significance that blood and soil might have for church membership— a rejection that impacts Christian Jews— he says nothing regarding non- Christian Jews.

This absence becomes problematic when he then uses an all-too-common Christian stereotype of legalistic Judaism. He claims that a church that embraces the limits to membership becomes a

Jewish Christian community. The opposite of the gospel is the law, states Bonhoeffer, and if the "Gentile Christian congregation"—meaning the German Reich church in this case— creates a congregation that is "bound by laws" of exclusion, they have become a "Church of Jewish Christian type."[32] Bonhoeffer's reasoning was based on his view that pre-Pauline followers of Jesus maintained communal membership through legalistic practices.[33] However, Bonhoeffer utilizes an unfounded stereotype of Jews as legalistic and exclusive to caution his audience from regressing to the theologically inferior Jews.

These are the most explicit statements regarding Jews that Bonhoeffer will ever make, thus giving them a lasting influence. Although he does defend the victims of the state by advocating that the church act, his anti-Judaic rhetoric complicates the legitimacy of the concern. It would be inappropriate to charge Bonhoeffer with antisemitism, as his arguments are strictly theological and thus anti-Judaic. However, the line between the two is blurred; Bonhoeffer's understanding of the Jews as theologically inferior can easily promote an understanding of the Jews not only as second-class Christians, but racially as second-class human beings.

Bonhoeffer's remarks seems to support that the "Jewish question" would only be solved if and when all Jews convert to Christianity. This is not unique to Bonhoeffer, as Barnett notes that many of the ecumenical groups that were helping the most with Jewish refugees during Bonhoeffer's life attempted to convert Jews as well.[34] Their humanitarian efforts had an ulterior motive which did not eliminate the good accomplished, but damaged the integrity of their efforts. As such, Rabbi Stanley Rosenbaum is critical of Bonhoeffer's work from 1933, writing him off as simply a "horrified humanitarian."[35]

Rosenbaum is keen to assess that Bonhoeffer and Luther both share a theology that neglects to understand Judaism outside of the "cardboard image of their Sunday Schools."[36] Bethge also recognizes that he and Bonhoeffer both were formed in a culture of anti-Judaic theology, which had embedded within it a biased account of Jews and Judaism.[37] This definition was given by the church, which strictly read the Older Testament christologically, failing to consider Jewish responses or an account of Judaism in Jewish terms.[38]

Caring for the Powerless: The Aftermath of the "Jewish Question"

As persecution increases of the Jews and others viewed as undesirable, Bonhoeffer's explicit anti-Judaism decreases, whereas his attempts to urge Christians to care for the powerless and suffering in his context emerges as the central focus of his thought. In his discourse on the Sermon on the Mount in *Discipleship,* Bonhoeffer recognizes how difficult it has become to remain on the "narrow path of the church's decision" and simultaneously embody the love and mercy that God has for all people, especially the "weak and godless."[39] When faced with a decision on how to act as a disciple, Bonhoeffer responds with his summary of Jesus's message: "bless them, do good to them, pray for them without condition, without regard for who they are."[40] This is consistent throughout Bonhoeffer's later work, especially in *Ethics* when he states that the Sermon on the Mount is the "proclamation of the incarnate love of God" that compels Christians to "self-denial" and maintain responsibility to and for the other.[41]

The church, following Jesus' example, is not permitted to exercise retribution in a way that seeks an eye for an eye. Instead, for the sake of the community, "retribution means patiently bearing the blow."[42] Disciples are unable to claim individual rights as their own possessions, but they should instead deny those rights for the sake of the other. Evil is overcome by finding itself squelched by the powerless, who choose not to respond with force. This is how crucifixion is turned into new life, with "marks of suffering" becoming "signs of grace."[43] Because of the incarnation in which Jesus "restored the image of God for all who bear a human countenance," any attacks on the poor and powerless are made against Christ himself.[44] Or, as he writes later in *Ethics*, "In Christ we see

God in the form of the poorest of our brothers and sisters."[45]

It is clear that Bonhoeffer is calling Christians to action for the sake of the powerless in the midst of Nazi Germany. However, the integrity of this message to suffer with and for the suffering is compromised by the anti-Judaic theology that is simultaneously present in *Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer maintains that Jews are thoroughly sinful because they have misused the law by making an idol of it and, in their legalism, have even attempted to use the law to control God.[46] In doing so, the Jews have cut themselves off from God, and God from them.[47] Bonhoeffer writes that even Sodom and Gomorrah will receive more mercy in their punishment because Israel has committed the gravest of sins: they rejected Jesus.[48] Jesus is able to forgive sins, but "those who reject the word of salvation itself cannot be saved" and are thus eternally rejected by God.[49] Despite his claims to make no distinctions for whom to suffer, there is a powerful undercurrent in his work that compromises his compelling thoughts on suffering— especially as they would apply to Jews suffering under Hitler.

Years later when Bonhoeffer writes *Ethics*, he once again focuses on the church's obligation to care for the powerless with a surprising absence of the anti-Judaic rhetoric that had previously permeated his work. In a striking section of *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer reflects on the church's complicity in Nazi Germany. He confesses that the church has squandered the name of Jesus Christ by not confronting the people who have abused that name to wreak havoc in society. Instead of fighting for the "most defenseless brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ," the church has ignored "the arbitrary use of brutal force…of countless innocent people…without finding ways of rushing to help them."[50] The church is guilty for having neglected each of the three options Bonhoeffer advocated for in 1933: the church neither held the state accountable through indirect or direct political action, nor did the church tend to the state-created victims.

Bonhoeffer argues for the protection of all lives because of the sanctity of life, a sanctity which no "arbitrary construct"— by which he means an individual, community, or institution— can decide.[51] Only in the God who creates, rather than in the politics of humans, can the worth of a life be determined. If an "arbitrary construct" attempted to interfere with the God-given value of life, inappropriate distinctions of "socially valuable or worthless life" would arise only to be "abandoned to the need of the moment and therefore to arbitrary action."[52] However, with the belief that God has deemed all human lives worthy of life, Bonhoeffer argues that life must be protected from "arbitrary killing."[53] As soon as the arbitrary killing of those deemed worthless takes place, "that group of people would fall victim into extermination."[54] These passages from *Ethics* are difficult to read without assuming Bonhoeffer was alluding to the innocent lives that were beginning to disappear in his midst—including those of the Jews. To do otherwise would be far too pessimistic of Bonhoeffer's work.

However, the irony between seemingly contradictory stances—that of blatant anti- Judaism yet a critical concern for those who suffer—remains even in this stage of Bonhoeffer's life, but in a new form. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer writes that the "historical Jesus Christ is the continuity of our history."[55] This is so because Jesus' messianic fulfillment serves as the connection point between Israel's history and Christianity. Bonhoeffer argues that the Jews have the purpose of keeping "open the question of Christ," serving as the "sign of God's free, gracious election and of God's rejecting wrath." "Driving out the Jew(s) from the West," Bonhoeffer writes, "must result in driving out Christ with them, for Jesus Christ was a Jew."[56] This passage is remarkable yet complicated for two reasons. First, although this is, as Kenneth Barnes notes, the first time Bonhoeffer links "Christianity with the Jews *as Jews*, not as potential Christians," the instrumental role Bonhoeffer grants the Jews should not be ignored: they cannot be driven out of society because of the theological role they serve.[57] This role is to remind Christians that Jews are the rejected people of God whereas Christians are the elected people of God. Second, this passage is also the first and only time Bonhoeffer identifies the Jewishness of Jesus—an identification which is anomalous (and dangerous) for German theologians at this time—hinting at but never developing a

theological bond between Jesus' identity and the indispensable presence of Jews in his midst. However, these two links Bonhoeffer makes between Christians and the people of Israel and Jesus and his Jewish identity are blips in Bonhoeffer's larger theology of the Jews and Judaism.

Bonhoeffer's aforementioned thoughts in *Discipleship* and *Ethics* do not explicitly contradict the anti-Judaic rhetoric present throughout his work up to this point. Rather, they highlight, as Eva Fleischner notes, the tension between the bravery of Bonhoeffer's work against Nazism with "how deeply the teaching of contempt has taken root."[58] Bonhoeffer, according to Barnett, did begin to think differently about the Jews as persecution by the Nazi regime intensified.[59] However, due to his premature and tragic death, it is unclear whether or not Bonhoeffer began to reassess his theological stances regarding Jews. Thus far, Bonhoeffer argued in the early 1930's for an anti-Judaic theology while also attempting to advocate for the victims of the state. His thoughts in *Discipleship* still reflect the tension between caring for victims and an undercurrent of anti-Judaism. But by *Ethics*, he begins to focus almost entirely upon caring for the powerless. Despite reflecting the anti-Judaism of his day—rather forcefully at times—Bonhoeffer's advocacy for the suffering comes to the forefront of his thought and remains his priority until his death.

This priority is seen most poignantly during his imprisonment in 1943 until his execution in 1945. Ignoring the temptation for self-pity, Bonhoeffer focuses on a hope for God to be put back into God's rightful place in the world: at the center. Bonhoeffer's assessment of the world from prison was that he was now living in a society that no longer had a need for the *deus ex machina* God. It was not that the world had become entirely atheistic, but that there had been a complete misappropriation of God's purpose and function in the world. Bonhoeffer assessed that God had been used for too long "as the stopgap for the incompleteness of our knowledge," but humans were now at a point when most issues could be understood in the world without the need for "Working hypothesis: God."[60] By learning about itself and how it works, the world had become confident in its own abilities. Bonhoeffer observed that questions involving "death and guilt" were the only questions left for which religious people looked to God for answers.[61] This created an illusion that religion's purpose was to secure personal salvation as a means to overcome this question of how to deal with death. Bonhoeffer criticizes this utilization of God, for "human life and human goodness" on this earth reflect what God values and what humans should be focused on.[62] There is no righteousness to be found in a personal understanding of salvation; God cannot be confined to private compartments of people's lives, because the righteousness of God is God's kingdom "on earth" at "the center of everything."[63]

The world that had removed God from God's rightful place had "come of age," distorting God and religion so significantly that both needed to be relinquished in order for the true God to be rediscovered in the world.[64] Bonhoeffer viewed this challenge positively, for it eliminated misunderstandings of who God is and thus revealed the "God of the Bible."[65] The surprising revelation of this God is that God was never meant to be a working hypothesis but the source of our being. This God, in Jesus Christ, consented to be "pushed out of the world and onto the cross."[66] In doing so, Christ's actions of showing solidarity to the suffering revealed how God is known in and to the world—in a way that, once encountered, turns "all human values upside down."[67] It is this revelation of God that had been "pushed out of the world, away from public human existence" that needed to be recovered in order for the church to adequately respond to the horrors taking place in Bonhoeffer's context.[68]

In reflecting on the years leading up to his imprisonment, Bonhoeffer argued that the church had spoken and acted not for others, but for self-protection. By seeking self-preservation, the church had acted as if it were its own telos instead of participating in reconciling the world to God.[69] Bonhoeffer did not believe the situation could be fixed simply by rethinking the words the church had spoken. The church needed to participate in actions of prayer and justice for the oppressed to recover Christian identity.[70] Bonhoeffer writes to Bethge's child that, as he grows up, actions and not words will be his only option of valuable response. In the midst of the persecution of so

many, Bonhoeffer explains that thought for him and his peers was actually “luxury afforded to onlookers,” and that the evil of the war will be proof that reasonable thinking was useless.[71] To have faith, then, is not to be preoccupied by thinking, but to share in Christ’s suffering, fully inhabiting all of the world’s troubles and finding not oneself but the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ.[72] As Christ grants freedom for all who come to know him, the Christian must realize that this freedom is freedom for others. Bonhoeffer’s Christology is marked not by a divinity from above, but from the incarnational view from below. In one of his most striking passages from prison, he reflects on the significance and value of “learning to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the perspective of the suffering.”[73] From this vantage point, Bonhoeffer is able to see Christ anew. Jesus’ identity is rooted in “being-for-others,” and in joining him in this “being-for-others,” the divine is experienced and self-liberation occurs.[74] To see the world from the perspective of below is to both affirm the world and the God who created it.

Bonhoeffer no longer maintains a focus on the state’s role in preserving order in a godless world as he did in 1933 because the state had failed.[75] Instead, “the human being is called upon to share in God’s suffering at the hands of a godless world.”[76] As Nazi oppression of non-Aryans worsened, Bonhoeffer saw the urgent need for the church to reclaim its role in the world as “the origin of all forgiveness, justification, and renewal.”[77] The state had failed as the protector of law and order to the extent that even the direct political action that Bonhoeffer had advocated for in 1933 was no longer an option. After witnessing for countless years of the church’s collective failure to be at the center of the world in freedom for others and calling the state’s actions into question, he holds the individual Christian responsible. However, the individual is not meant to pray and bring about justice alone. Rather, in individual suffering the Christian finds herself in communion with other Christians gathered together in Christ’s body, finding not death or despair but joy and life.[78]

A Legacy of Contradictory Theological Visions for the Present

As the body of Christ, the church is able to reclaim and restore God to the center of human existence. This is a human act in Bonhoeffer’s theology because humans had abandoned God and distorted God’s role in the world. By and in the hope of the resurrection, Christians are gathered together not in a vision of salvation that allows Christians to escape to eternity, but in a crucible of crucifixion and resurrection that “refers people to their life on earth in a wholly new way.”[79] Bonhoeffer’s ecclesial vision is timeless and convicting for both Christian complicity in the Holocaust and in the church’s negligence to participate in the redemption of those who suffer today, for “the church is the church only when it is there for others.”[80] Retribution is not rooted in fairness but in forgiveness. It is in the collective sharing of suffering with the powerless, and in the transformation of retribution, that the church can become the place where the failure of Christians to extend compassion and solidarity to the oppressed is forgiven and restored. For the church to reclaim God at the center of human existence, Bonhoeffer lamented that the suffering in Nazi Germany must not be ignored in thought or practice any longer.

Unfortunately, in the belief that any profession of loyalty to Hitler was antithetical to the Christian faith, Bonhoeffer was an anomaly among Christian leaders. However, the question to ask is what *kind* of Christian Bonhoeffer urged his fellow sisters and brothers to be. Bonhoeffer’s work is permeated with his focus on the Christian necessity to join Christ in caring for the oppressed. However, in relation to the countless number of Jews who suffered under Hitler, the weakness in Bonhoeffer’s thought was that it had an undercurrent of anti-Judaism that compromised the legitimacy of his call for Christians to join any suffering person in solidarity. He argues for a radical commitment to Christ, not Hitler, yet he also advocates for a theological commitment to Jewish survival only for the purpose of conversion.

As we reflect on Bonhoeffer's work today, it is crucial that we constructively engage both his staggering commitment to the oppressed and also how some Jews have assessed Bonhoeffer's work in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Two Jewish perspectives on Bonhoeffer's legacy come from Richard Rubenstein in 2000 and Yad Vashem in 2003 regarding whether Bonhoeffer should receive the distinction from Yad Vashem as a "Designation of Righteous Among the Nations."

Rubenstein optimistically affirms Bonhoeffer and believes he should be praised for his work throughout the Holocaust. He considers Bonhoeffer's troubling stance towards Jews in his 1933 work on the Jewish Question, yet he believes this anti-Judaism is less indicative of Bonhoeffer himself and more telling of his German Lutheran upbringing.[81] Rubenstein admits his deep offense at Bonhoeffer's citations of Luther, in addition to Bonhoeffer's anti-Judaic rhetoric that urged Jews to "repent of the sin of fidelity" to their Jewish tradition.[82] However, he recognizes that this was not central to Bonhoeffer's main concern, which was clearly to oppose the effects of the Aryan Paragraph on the "community where he had a voice."[83] In 1933, Bonhoeffer had had very little contact with Jews in Germany—especially religiously observant Jews. Therefore, Rubenstein does not find any compelling reason to think that Bonhoeffer should *not* have carried on the legacy of anti-Judaism in his tradition. Rubenstein is able to look past Bonhoeffer's anti-Judaism and celebrate his work in combatting Nazism within his Christian community. He does not deny the issues with Bonhoeffer's anti-Judaism but identifies the problem within Christianity as a whole. Rubenstein's contention is that Bonhoeffer should not be martyred for the tradition into which he was born.[84]

As for Yad Vashem, after years of rejecting various requests from Rubenstein and others for Bonhoeffer to receive the "Designation of Righteous Among the Nations," Yad Vashem went to extreme measures to thoroughly consider Bonhoeffer's case. In 2003, twenty committee members convened in an emergency session to consider Bonhoeffer's case. Even after "bending the rules," he was still unanimously denied the award.[85] The two determining criteria included whether Bonhoeffer had risked his life to save any Jews, and whether he "publicly opposed Jewish persecution or…tried to stop the murder of Jews"— even if he were unsuccessful in doing so.[86] They did not find that Bonhoeffer met these criteria, stating that he fought for the rights of Jewish-Christians pertaining to church membership as opposed to defending all Jews that suffered persecution under Nazism. Further, he supported the theological persecution of Jews based on the charge of deicide among other anti-Judaic beliefs.[87] Yad Vashem did not condemn Bonhoeffer, neither rejecting Bonhoeffer's "meritorious recognition by Christian organizations" nor questioning his "pureness of character as a believing Christian;" however, they found that his case was not appropriate for receiving the distinction.[88]

Paul van Buren, a Christian theologian engaged in post-Holocaust theology, recognized the opportunity for reconstructive theological work, arguing that despite the countless ways churches have denounced antisemitism after the Holocaust, Christians have failed to come to terms with the "virus of anti-Judaism."[89] This virus, in Stephen Hayne's opinion, communicated "the very attitudes and prejudices that made the Nazi party successful and the Holocaust possible."[90] Confessing these anti-Judaic beliefs as oppressive and unbiblical for the sake of the Jewish community at large is a way to hold together the opinions of both Rubenstein and Yad Vashem. Bonhoeffer did not survive the Holocaust and have the opportunity to rethink his anti- Judaism. However, repenting of and repudiating the virus that jeopardized the Christian proclamation for which he advocated would be a way to honor his memory and constructively engage his thought in order to move forward.

One of the greatest dangers with anti-Judaic theology in general is that it is difficult to stop theological beliefs from impacting practical actions. The question that must be asked both of Bonhoeffer and of us today is whether or not we are likely to defend the Jews if we believe God is punishing them or that they are theologically inferior. No answer can truly be given, yet the question itself is illuminating. Bonhoeffer's attempts to urge the church towards faithfulness to God

in the midst of Nazi Germany are commendable and tragically rare among many Christians at that time. However, his anti-Judaism contributed to a German cultural and Christian theological understanding that Jews are inferior to others. This paper is not meant to disregard the profound impact Bonhoeffer's work and life had on his context and should have on ours today. Rather, it is to hold in tension Bonhoeffer's resistance to Nazism while recognizing the virus of anti-Judaism in the midst of his courageous and selfless efforts—a virus which continues to infect Christianity to the present day.

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