

International

# NEWSLETTER

Bonhoeffer Society *for Archive and Research*

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OXFORD: CALL FOR PAPERS

As announced in the last Newsletter, the Third International Bonhoeffer Conference will be held March 28-31, 1980 at St. Edmund's Hall, Oxford University. Detailed plans are now being made and, while they are not final, enough guidelines are available to issue a call for papers. The overall theme will probably be "Bonhoeffer and the Church in the Modern World." Sub-themes under consideration are "Faith and Secular Society" and "Ethical Responsibility: The Individual, the Group and the Church."

On two days of the conference it is anticipated that we will run seminar-type groups at which papers will be presented. All members and friends of the Society are invited to submit proposals, which should be in the form of a 1-2 page precis or outline. Proposals related to the above themes are particularly welcome. However, proposals on other subjects will not automatically be excluded. If you are working on a piece of research which you feel would appropriately be presented at the Conference, please submit a proposal even if it is not directly related to these (admittedly broad) themes. Note, too, that the themes point not only to historical analysis of Bonhoeffer's work and writings, but also to the contemporary task of theology, Christian ethics and the church in relation to Bonhoeffer's legacy.

Proposals should be sent to our Secretary-Treasurer, Dr. Geoffrey Kelly, La Salle College, Philadelphia PA 19141 in the next few weeks. Early in the fall we will notify proposal authors of the papers which will be included in the Oxford program.

NEW YORK AAR MEETING

The Society will hold its regular meeting next November 15-18 at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. The program has been completed and details will be announced in the next Newsletter.

BOOK REVIEW

The Old Testament As The Book of Christ (An Appraisal of Bonhoeffer's Interpretation). By Martin Kuske. Translated by S. T. Kimbrough, Jr. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976. Pp. 173.

Reviewed by Donald G. Vincent, Director of Ministry, Ecumenical Board for Campus Ministry, New College/U.S.F., Sarasota, Florida.

Martin Kuske introduces section three of his book, also titled "The Old Testament as the Book of Christ", with a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's introduction to Creation and Fall, 1933: "the church of the Holy Scripture" reads "all Holy Scripture as the book . . . of Christ" (p. 32). The implication is that, since all Holy Scripture is to be read as the book of Christ and the Old Testament is Holy Scripture, the Old Testament is the book of Christ for Christians.

The reader of Kuske's book is continually aware that Bonhoeffer is writing as a Christian to the Christian community. One may choose to study Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Genesis 1:1f., or his study of "King David", or any other Old Testament selection and, according to Kuske, find its relevant message only in the light of the incarnate, crucified and risen Lord. "Jesus Christ as the revelation of God stands between us and the Old Testament" (p. 39).

Bonhoeffer is identified as sharing in the Old Testament discussions of hermeneutics with such specialists as H. W. Wolff, W. Zimmerli, A. Jepsen, and G. von Rad. This is because of a "double movement of a mutual understanding," or the view that the Old Testament must be understood in the light of Christ and the New Testament in light of the Old Testament. However, Kuske identifies another interpretive point of view in Bonhoeffer's writings, a viewpoint not found with the scholars mentioned. That viewpoint is that Christ is found in the Old Testament.

Whether or not Bonhoeffer was influenced by the writings of H. F. Kohlbrügge and A. F. C. Vilmar is open to debate. Bonhoeffer's method of seeing Christ in the Old Testament, however, closely resembles their studies.

Questions raised and dealt with by Kuske include who the "I" in the Psalms may be, and the meaning of a "theological interpretation", and the matter of "real presence" or "Personal presence". Kuske also deals with Bonhoeffer's increasing dissatisfaction of the historical-critical method during the church struggle. Referring to Bonhoeffer's study of "King David" Kuske writes: "Bonhoeffer did not deliver an academic lecture, rather a Bible study for vicars of the Confessing Church! Old Testament interpretation in this context was not neutral, but took place in view of the opponent for whom the Old Testament could no longer be 'the book of the church.' This opponent had to be repulsed" (p. 76).

Given the times and the place of Bonhoeffer's Biblical studies it must not be forgotten that he reclaimed the Old Testament

for the German Evangelical Church. His immediate concern was not for accepted Biblical scholarship. His interest was to communicate God's will and to grasp the Biblical Word of God in order to plan present actions. "Did Bonhoeffer surrender the Old Testament? Yes, if one looks at the Old Testament only as the object of historical-critical research. No, to the contrary: he won it anew for the church" (p. 84).

Kuske sheds some light on Bonhoeffer's "world come of age" phrase. This study highlights Bonhoeffer's basic approach to the scripture. "Bonhoeffer understood the Old Testament as the book of Christ at all times, to the extent that it never became the Word in itself, but always in relation to Christ" (p. 145). Again Kuske opens the way for an interpretation that does not end with Christ only in relation to scripture. He raises writings of Bonhoeffer, such as Psalm 58, that seemingly insist that Christ is also in the Old Testament. While this insistence does not deny the critical-historical method, neither does it rely on the method as the only interpretive tool. For Bonhoeffer it is the same God in both testaments, speaking to the present-day Christian community. The God who speaks is the God revealed in Christ.

Because of a helpful first chapter on "The Evaluation of the Old Testament In Bonhoeffer's Setting," the reader is made aware of the various Old Testament evaluations that Bonhoeffer learned from and had to contend with during the church struggle. Kuske presents three options of the time: 1) those who wanted the Old Testament rejected (the anti-semitic-nationalistic movement); 2) those who thought the Old Testament should be retained as a witness of the pre-stage of Christianity; and 3) those who acknowledged the Old Testament as the Word of God. Bonhoeffer joined Karl Barth and Wilhelm Vischer in the third category.

Today it is possible to raise questions about Bonhoeffer's method of approaching the Old Testament on academic grounds and we may question whether or not his claiming of the Old Testament as the Book of Christ represented a theological antisemitism. It would have been nice if Kuske or Bonhoeffer had acknowledged the presence of a viable, living Jewish community with a commitment to Torah. Kuske has given us some new insights into the involvement of Bonhoeffer with the problems of his time. We must be careful when we criticize people of the past who were not fortunate enough to have the luxury of time. Bonhoeffer's interpretation must be understood as a "church-struggle-related" method and that involved the struggle and the desire to retain the Old Testament as Holy Scripture for the Christian Church.

The Old Testament As The Book Of Christ is a challenging piece of workmanship. The footnotes, alone, make this volume an enjoyable and worthwhile reference. Also, of interest is the nationality of the author. He is the Director of Studies for the Predigerseminar of the Evangelical Church in Gnadau, East Germany.

RESPONSES TO NEW ORLEANS PAPERS

John D. Godsey, Wesley Theological Seminary: Response to Martin Rumscheidt, "Two Voices from Prison: Boethius and Bonhoeffer."

Martin Rumscheidt deserves our gratitude for drawing our attention to some striking similarities between two men so far apart in time and so influential on subsequent history. I must confess that before accepting this assignment I knew precious little about Boethius, whose life spanned the last twenty years of the fifth century and the first twenty-four of the sixth. I found the man and his times to be fascinating and have learned a lot in a short time, but I certainly am aware of my limitations in trying to offer a critique of this paper.

Let me briefly list what I consider to be Martin's main points:

1. There are a number of interesting parallels in the lives of Boethius and Bonhoeffer: both stemmed from patrician families that upheld the best traditions in their respective cultures; both were imprisoned on false charges; both wrote enduring works while in prison; both were cruelly executed without proper trial, and other members of their families were executed as well; both lived in "dark times" and were caught in the struggle between might and right.

2. There are also striking parallels in the thought of Boethius and Bonhoeffer: both were Christians who eschewed otherworldly or parochial or triumphalistic views of Christian faith; who advocated a non-religious, this-worldly Christianity; and who grounded life in the penultimate and public realm in an arcane discipline of "praying and doing justice."

To the first point, I can only say "Amen." Indeed, from my reading about Boethius I found a number of additional parallels to those that Martin cited. For example, both had large scholarly projects underway that they considered to be "life works" (Boethius' translation of Plato and Aristotle into Latin and an attempt to synthesize the two philosophies, Bonhoeffer's Ethics); both subordinated their scholarly work to public service, when the latter was called for in the circumstances of their times; both put themselves in jeopardy by coming to the defense of others (in Boethius' case, his fellow Senator Albinus; in Bonhoeffer's, all who were suffering from Hitler's madness); both were forced to see things from a new and unusual perspective, namely, "from below"; both turned to writing poetry and prayers in prison; both refused to allow misfortune to shake their confidence in God; both while in prison were concerned for how the next generation would live; and both died at a relatively young age: Boethius at 44, Bonhoeffer at 39.

On the other hand, it seems important to me to point out a significant difference in the life situation of these two men,

beyond of course the obvious fact that Boethius' career was that of a philosopher-statesman, whereas Bonhoeffer's vocation was that of a theologian-churchman. That difference concerns the character of their oppressors. King Theodoric of the Ostrogoths was, to say the least, a noble barbarian of the Arian Christian faith who gave Italy thirty years of peaceful and just rule during those waning years of the Roman Empire. Thus this cruel act of killing Boethius, and a little later his father-in-law Symmachus, was really out of character, an act of an aged monarch grown suspicious and perhaps senile. Theodoric can only stand out favorably when contrasted to the neurotic and destructive rule of Hitler. Let me illustrate the difference in a concrete way: during his rule Theodoric protected the Jews against the Catholic Christians, Hitler plotted their destruction.

Another difference regarding the situation of Boethius and Bonhoeffer is this: throughout his trial and imprisonment Boethius claimed his innocence of the charge of plotting against Theodoric, and although Bonhoeffer outwardly pleaded innocent of charges in order to protect resisters and their plans, we know how deeply he was actually involved in the plot against Hitler and that he is, as Bethge has said, a "guilty" martyr.

Now to Martin's second point. The question seems to boil down to whether or not Boethius in this prison writing was acting and thinking as a committed Christian. Isn't it striking that in this time of soul-searching in the face of death he writes of The Consolation of Philosophy and that he never once mentions Jesus Christ or the Christian faith? The secondary sources I read on this question were split about equally, some claiming Boethius for Christianity, others claiming him for philosophy. There is no question, of course, about the fact of Boethius' belief in God, but, as one writer (S.H. Mellone) put it, "The Consolation of Philosophy sets forth a complete outlook on life, springing from a pure monotheism more akin in spirit to a platonized stoicism than to the theism of the New Testament. There is nothing distinctive of Christian doctrine in the book, but also nothing hostile to Christian theism."

Boethius' influence on the Middle Ages was more philosophical (the transmission of Aristotle's logic, the introduction of the nominalist controversy) than theological, whereas Bonhoeffer's influence has been mainly on the church and its theological understanding. Contrary to Martin's opinion, I suspect that Boethius found his consolation in Hellenistic philosophical theism because this represented his deepest convictions. In Bonhoeffer's case, there is no doubt. He found his consolation in the crucified Christ - the One who suffered for the world.

David H. Hopper, Macalester College: Response to James Woelfel, "The Christian Rebel: Camus and Bonhoeffer on Revolt."

I value this paper highly, first, because it is provocative and, second, because Camus presents an alternative statement on the possible use and limits of violence to Eberhard Bethge's discussion of Bonhoeffer. I am indebted to Woelfel for

his nice exposition of Camus' views on violence.

The main point of the paper, I take it, is that Bonhoeffer's later thought (Ethics, Letters) offers a kind of theological answer to Camus' critique of Christianity. Woelfel points out that Camus took exception to three major themes in Christian faith: the doctrine of an omnipotent Creator, the doctrine of reconciliation through the suffering and dying Christ, and the belief in eternal life. Camus claimed that these aspects of Christian faith induce a quiescent, submissive attitude toward life and have led generally to an acquiescence in evil and suffering on the part of the great majority of Christians. Woelfel does not deal explicitly with the validity of these charges--charges which, of course, are not original with Camus and have had prior history. In fact Woelfel suggests that "theological protestations against Camus' characterization of Christianity are easy to make" (Woelfel, p. 5) but he then goes on to say that "Camus' issues remain real and agonizing ones" and he even adds his own series of arguments (Woelfel, p. 6) in opposition to traditional modes of Christian thought on the question of God's goodness and the problem of evil.

It is at this point that Woelfel offers fullest development to Camus' theme of "revolt." Though Camus suggests that the idea of an omnipotent God was the original occasion for man's "metaphysical revolt," that revolt is no longer limited to a rejection of theism. Metaphysical revolt, as defined by Camus, "is the movement by which man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation" (Woelfel, p. 8). It can be aimed against God, or as is clear in The Myth of Sisyphus, against a meaningless world. It is metaphysical revolt that underlies at its deepest level "historical revolt," though historical rebellion may not always fully articulate the former. Out of historical revolt, however, common human values do emerge. And Camus tries to establish a basis of value arising out of the act of rebellion. Woelfel quotes Camus: "In assigning oppression a limit within which begins the dignity common to all men, rebellion defined a primary value" (p. 7). Stated in different terms: "I rebel. . . therefore, we exist" (p. 8). What follows from this point is a description of the limits of violence as spelled out by Camus (pp. 10-15).

Woelfel then argues that Bonhoeffer's later theology offers a kind of answer to Camus' complaints about Christian doctrine, and that Bonhoeffer's active participation in the plot against Hitler constitutes an interesting parallel to the kind of involvement, with recognition of the limits of violence, which Camus himself favored in his discussion of "historical rebellion."

The chief weakness of Woelfel's argument--if in fact he is offering us an argument--is, I feel, the tendency of the paper to fall into two relatively independent parts. On the one hand, there is the theodicy problem and the charge of chronic Christian quietism, and on the other hand there is the question of violence, values, and the limits of violence, which Camus suggests can arise

quite independent of the question about God.

On the first point, Woelfel seems to be saying that if Camus had read the later Bonhoeffer and Bonhoeffer's redefinition of God's omnipotence ("Before God and with God we live without God"), his reformation of Christology ("Jesus, the man for others") and his reappraisal of Old Testament this-worldliness (vs. a premature New Testament resurrection faith), he might have been more sympathetic to the possibilities of Christian faith.

While this speculative probing of Camus' antipathy to Christian faith is interesting, it is not clear where it really brings us in the end. Since the injustice of the suffering of the innocent is a major focus of Camus' rejection of God, there is not much really that can be said to "resolve" Camus' burden of doubt. The biblical tradition does not have a great deal to say about the suffering of the innocent--except perhaps in the person of Christ, or also Job. It has much more to say about suffering and forgiveness in relation to guilt, and the possibility of suffering on behalf of others. But Camus does not seem to discuss the latter theme at all, and only in his last novel, The Fall, does he begin to probe the problem of guilt. Certainly the Bible provides major precedence for siding with the victims against the oppressors, but in the Bible this appears to derive much less from a sense of outraged innocence than is certainly the case in Camus.

As for Camus' effort to establish a system of value on the basis of the act of revolt, Woelfel expresses reservation ("I do not want to defend his theory of revolt as a sufficient general account and justification of moral values"; p. 6), but one detects in Woelfel a deep sympathy for Camus' attempt to limit the scope of violence and he prods us to take very seriously this particular possibility of a non-theistic human good. Woelfel does not lay out for us his own reservations about Camus' argument here; it would have been very instructive, I think, for him to have done so. For myself, while I appreciate the point that human revolt, manifesting itself in violence, is essentially a positive affirmation of value which sets limits to oppression, I am not convinced that impassioned revolt isn't more frequently intent simply on the obliteration of the source of pain, to wit, the oppressor (cf. Frantz Fanon's analysis of violence and revolt in The Wretched of the Earth). Thus, I see Camus' provocative assertion, "I revolt--therefore we exist," chiefly as an effort to establish within radical, non-theistic existentialism some kind of base for a social ethic. Jean Paul Sartre's formula "In choosing my freedom, I choose the freedom of everyman" is an equivalent attempt to deal with this chronic problem in existentialist thought.

It is my surmise that James Woelfel will one day present us with his own enlightening discussion of some of the problems raised by Camus--and we look forward to that, expectantly!

NEWS ITEMS

Chr. Kaiser Verlag recently announced publication of the second volume in the series, Internationales Bonhoeffer Forum: Verspieltes Erbe? Dietrich Bonhoeffer und der deutsche Nachkriegsprotestantismus. Edited by Ernst Feil, the volume consists chiefly of papers delivered at a conference in January, 1978 at the Evangelical Academy, Hofgeismar. In addition to Feil's Foreword, the volume contains the following: Rudolf von Thadden, Dietrich Bonhoeffer und der deutsche Nachkriegsprotestantismus; Yorick Spiegel, Dietrich Bonhoeffer und die 'protestantisch-preussische Welt'; Dieter Schellong, Kirchliches Schuldbekenntnis. Gedanken Bonhoeffers und die Wirklichkeit des deutschen Nachkriegsprotestantismus; Timo Rainer Peters, Jenseits von Radikalismus und Kimpromiss. Die politische Verantwortung der Christen nach Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Pinchas Lapide, Dietrich Bonhoeffer und das Judentum; Ernst Lange, Gutachten ze Theodore A Gill's 'Memo for a Movie.'

Charles R. Streich (22 Hewlett Dr., E. Williston, N.Y. 11596) needs the following books: Robertson ed., True Patriotism; Leibholz, The Bonhoeffers: Portrait of a Family; Bosanquet, Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Rasmussen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality & Resistance; Marle, Bonhoeffer; Vorkink ed., Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age; Marty, Place of Bonhoeffer; Hamilton, Life in One's Stride; Robertson, Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Gould, The Worldly Christian; Mehta, The New Theologian; Reist, Promise of Bonhoeffer. If you have any copies you are willing to sell, please write to Chuck.

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